APRIL 1st ISSUE, 1931
VOL. LXXVIII No. 2

ADVENTURE

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Adventure

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O'BRIEN, BUCCANEER
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Ended Dandruff Quickly

Dear Sirs:

When I graduated from college and went into the bond business, the matter of my personal appearance was of prime importance and falling hair and dandruff added nothing to my neatness. Upon the advice of my barber I purchased my first bottle of Listerine. The first bottle did not totally stop my trouble, but successive applications soon got to the root of the evil and today I have no scalp trouble at all.

(Signed) Marshall Lewis,
Philadelphia, Pa.

Doesn't Fear Inspection Now

Dear Sirs:

Every man in Uncle Sam's Navy knows how hard it is to keep the blue uniforms spotless. Several months ago I was handicapped with a bad case of dandruff. I had tried various remedies but to no avail. One day I noticed an advertisement wherein it was stated that Listerine would kill 200,000,000 germs in 15 seconds. Right away I made a trip to our canteen and purchased a bottle.

I used it freely every third day, and today I have hair free from troublesome dandruff. It certainly is a relief to know that when I put on my best suit of "blues" for an inspection, that I will not have the shoulders spotted with flakes of dandruff. More power to Listerine!

D. G. Rorie, U. S. S. Utah

Clean Scalp Ends Dandruff

Dear Sirs:

Being a great believer in personal hygiene, the problem of dandruff has annoyed me persistently for several years. I have tried patent shampoos, oil treatments and so on, ad infinitum, but always the little white flecks would appear on my coat collar.

After scanning a Listerine advertisement, I decided to try it in combating my dandruff. I used a large bottle of it and noticed a marked decrease in the white flecks upon my coat collar. I purchased other bottles and applied it regularly and freely using it full strength and massaging the scalp well with each application. Now my dandruff has disappeared and my scalp is in a truly hygienic condition.

(Signed) Harrison A. Wilson,
Greenville, Ohio

No More White Flakes

Gentlemen:

The plumbers had turned off the water in my San Francisco apartment. I prepared to shave and so discovered this fact. I couldn't shave and, worse yet, I had nothing with which to "plaster down" my hair. For years I had used water for this purpose and for years I had had dandruff which I regarded as a necessary evil. I opened the medicine chest to see if it contained anything I could use for the purpose and Listerine seemed to be the only thing at all eligible.

Soon after I noticed my dandruff was disappearing. The scaly white flakes no longer dotted my coat collar. I am never without Listerine now and I use about one large-size bottle per month for my hair alone.

(Signed) Victor L. Klee,
Los Altos, Calif.

Hair Was Thin

Dear Sirs:

Dandruff caused me great uneasiness. So I purchased a large-size bottle of Listerine and used it twice a week for five weeks. Before the bottle was exhausted a plainly perceptible improvement in my scalp rewarded my efforts and the continued use of Listerine has produced for me a perfectly healthy scalp, free from dandruff, the natural result being thick, healthy hair of improved color and texture.

(Signed) Virgil W. Burgess,
Champaign, Illinois

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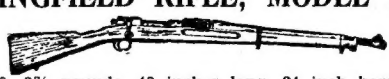

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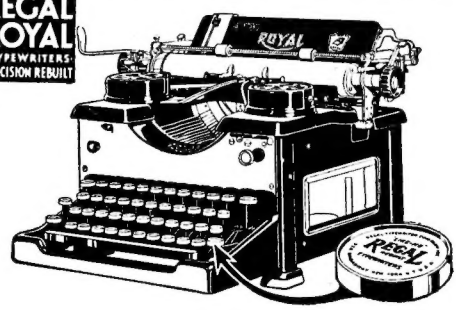

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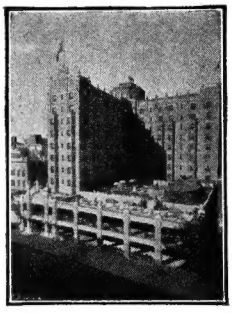

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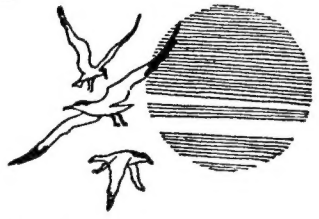

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April 1st, 1931

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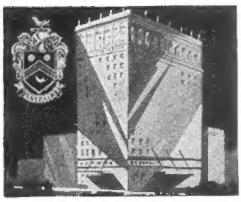
Number 2

In St. Louis



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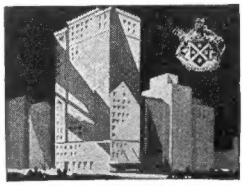

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The six o'clock mystery . . .

Herlock Sholmes and his good friend Batson had noticed the man when he came in at precisely 6:03½ P. M.

"A dangerous looking fellow," murmured Sholmes. "Notice the twitching nerves around his eyes, and the smoldering impatience in every gesture. He'll bear watching . . ."

At 6:27 the man reappeared . . . a beam of loving kindness in his eye, a low jolly whistle on his lips.

"I say, Batson!" said Herlock, "the man must be a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. I never saw such an astounding change in a personality! We must find the cause."

Picture Herlock and his faithful Batson in the man's apartment . . . measuring, digging through drawers, peering into corners. But pill or powder found they none!

Then Herlock threw open the bathroom door. A tropical warmth still lingered in the air, and the mirror was misted with steam. A splash of water on the floor . . . a heap of damp towel . . . and in the soap dish, a smooth, alabaster-white rectangle.

"Eureka!" he cried, "I have it!"

"Have what?" asked Batson, who never was very bright.

Herlock scorned to answer. He drew a tub . . . he threw off his clothes . . . he tossed the rectangle upon the water . . . and as he slid luxuriously into the steaming bath, he uttered these cryptic words—"It floats."

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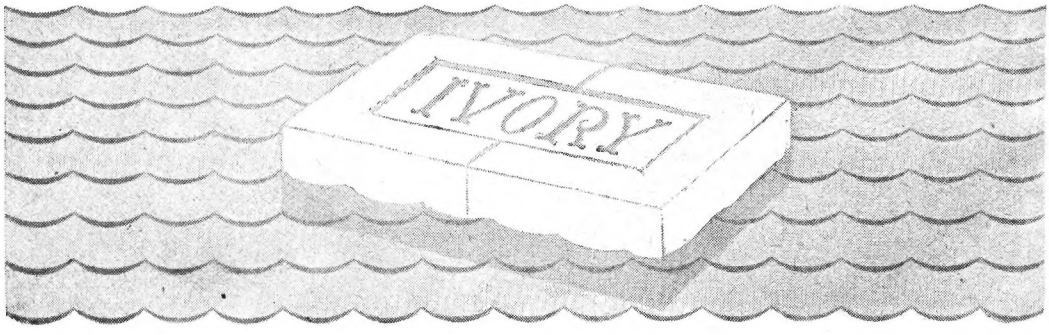

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

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A Novelette of High

O'BRIEN, BUCCANEER

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

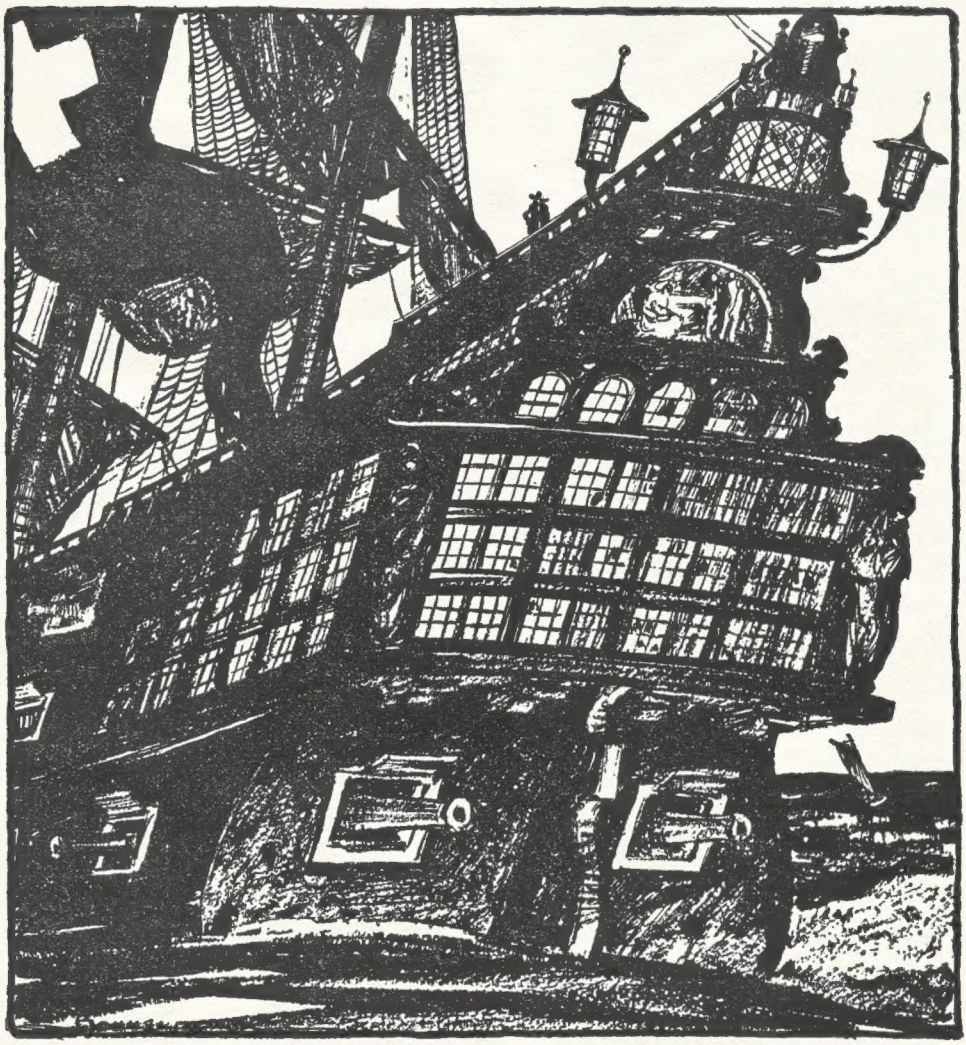
THE PINNACE was a large, clumsy, heavy craft with blunt bows and a stumpy mast on which a square canvas was rigged with a makeshift gaff and boom constructed from unbarked tree limbs and rope.

Under a blazing morning sun, she ploughed relentlessly across the blue-green rollers of the Caribbean, almost dead before the wind, toward the rising blue growth of land that broke the sword line of the horizon. The sun tanned and shriveled bodies of two men were huddled beneath her midship thwarts, as though they had there sought some shelter, and died. Up forward, face down across the bow thwart beside the mast, was the body of a huge, red haired man, a dirty, blood stained bandage about his chest, and dried blood black on the thwart and gunwale beside him.

The only living thing in the boat was the man sitting at the helm, arm crooked over the tiller, his head on his breast.

Except for tattered breeches, he was naked, sun blackened; he was wide in the shoulder, his arms and torso a mass of smooth, rippling muscle. His face was blurred behind a week's growth of yellow-gray beard, and sun bleached yellow hair hung long about his ears, and both hair and beard were encrusted with brine. Water

Adventure on the Spanish Main



sloshed unheeded in the boat's bottom.

The man at the tiller lifted his head. Blue eyes came wide open as he saw the purpling rise of land ahead. He stared at it, then stooped over stiffly and opened a locker in the sternsheets of the pinnace. From this he produced a little wooden keg, balanced it in his hand, and held it to his lips. He drank thirstily, dragged out some ship's biscuit wrapped in canvas, and munched away. His wrists showed half healed scars, as from handcuffs.

It was obvious that the other three men had not died of thirst and starvation.

The sun mounted higher in the brazen sky, reached meridian, slowly drove on in his course westward. The blue-purple land widened and changed in color, bright-

ening to a vivid green. From the long wave crests, as the pinnace rose beneath their hissing drive, the land became more distinct.

"An island," muttered the man at the tiller. "Lord knows what island!"

The sun was halfway to the horizon when, from the top of a wave, he first saw the smoke. He was closer, now; gradually the smoke grew more distinct, apparently rising from the shore ahead. The steady breeze, however, was failing fast, and it was evident that he would not gain the land before night.

He shrugged, ate more biscuit, emptied the water keg without losing a drop, and presently, with his canvas flapping idly and the boat rocking gently to the sunset, he fell asleep.

Cold white light wakened him; the moon was just risen, almost at its full—but under the moon was a ruddier glare. A windless current had brought him closer to the island; a breeze was coming down from the north, and he drew in his sheet and caught the tiller. Not more than a couple of miles off shore, he calculated; but the glare puzzled him.

"Fires on the beach, but I can't make 'em out," he muttered, squinting at the veiled shore. "Must be a headland—that argues a cove or a bay, eh? Fires argue men. An island argues a ship, egad! Either Spaniards turtle fishing, or brethren of the coast bucaning meat—what matter? On with you, worthy Colonel O'Brien, and devil take you if you guess wrong!"

He laughed and swung the tiller as the pinnace heeled over a trifle to the wind. In this year of grace 1692, he was not the only man without a country haunting the Carib keys.

The pinnace drove in ever closer to the island, O'Brien heading for the ruddy glare. He could tell now that it was the reflection of firelight against high trees, and the steadily droning boom of surf came drifting back athwart the breeze. Then, suddenly, the point of a headland was gone and the fires themselves came into the sight. And more—much more!

Between the moon, now high, and the half dozen great blazing fires, was disclosed the curving shores of a wide and pleasant cove, backed by a wall of circling forest green. Through the sound of the surf outside lifted voices; a sudden wild burst of them in a rousing lilt of song, whose chorus came clearly to O'Brien as he brought the pinnace around:

"Down among the dead men,
Down among the dead men,
Down, down, down, down—
Down among the dead men, let him lie!"

O'Brien's lips parted in a laugh.

"A Jacobite catch, eh? Come, here are no dons, at least!"

Dark figures showed here and there against the fire glitter, but O'Brien had abruptly lost interest in all the scene ashore—a scene of carousal, as his ears testified. He had caught sight of something far more interesting, and closer at hand: a trim brigantine, her spars and lines picked out by the light, anchored bow and stern in the cove.

No glimmer of light showed aboard her; she hung there like a dead thing in the tide, half a mile from the curving sandy shore, where two boats lay on the beach above high water mark. O'Brien chuckled as the puffy airs of the cove filled his canvas and sent him slowly ahead.

"Faith, what better could I want, now? They'll all be ashore till sometime tomorrow when they wake up, and if I can gain her unseen . . ."

He bore down upon her steadily, with never a hail nor a light from her deck. The shrieks of women came from ashore—delighted, drunken shrieks of laughter—and were drowned in a wild French rouse swept up by a mad chorus of voices. The night was well begun, obviously, and O'Brien hoped there was liquor enough on the beach to keep it going heartily.

The pinnace slipped through the still water without a ripple, and presently the stern of the brigantine slid between her and the shore. O'Brien cast loose his sheet, let go the halyard and his splotch of canvas rustled down. The ship was still all silent and deserted, evidently;

he forged slowly alongside, and the pinnace came in against her with a crash and a groan. In her waist, O'Brien came upon a great gap in the bulwarks, whence hung a tangle of cordage. He caught a line, made the pinnace fast and, after testing the tangle, mounted to the deck.

"A yard shot away, eh?" he observed. "And everything topsy-turvy — ha! They've taken a prize after a fight, and now they're digesting the loot. So much the better."

The moon showed him her disarranged and cluttered deck, empty of life, and he turned aft. Here, sheltered by the deckhouse, he found a dim burning lantern. Beside it a man lay snoring, a man nearly naked to the warm night, his right leg a peg of wood and leather, an open keg of rum close beside him. O'Brien took the pannikin from the deck, dipped it at the keg, and tasted the rum. With a grimace, he dropped it.

Catching up the lantern, he turned up the wick a trifle, got a better light, and started aft.

He was not long in discovering that the ship was an untidy mess, but he found all he sought in the way of food, with good wine to wash it down. The after cabin was a litter of splendid garments, weapons, and miscellaneous loot strewn about. When he had eaten and drunk his fill, O'Brien washed and shaved luxuriously, the operation revealing a lean and long jawed face that wore a cheerful smile. The blue eyes twinkled at those in the mirror.

"Faith, Colonel, you look a bit white where the beard lay. Well, a bit o' sleep won't hurt a bit—but there are a few things to do first."

Naked and shaved, his long hair trussed back into a knot behind his head, he filled a long clay pipe from its rack and lighted it at the lantern. Puffing at this with sheer pleasure, he laid it down presently and went on deck again, and paused beside the snoring man with the wooden leg. He sat down and bumped the man's head, repeatedly, against the deck, until a drowsy oath rewarded his pains.

"Is that you, Hardinge, blast your ruddy eyes?" muttered the man.

"Aye," said O'Brien. "D'ye know what island this is, lad?"

"Aves, you drunken fool. Go away and let me sleep, or I'll have Cap'n Vernier truss you up!" His head sank back on the deck, and he muttered again as he resumed his snoring, "Vernier or a new cap'n—all one to me—Vernier or—the devil..."

O'Brien straightened up. Aves—the little Island of Aves, haunt of Mansfelt and the great Morgan, where a debauch might be held or a ship careened and scraped without interference of any man! And he was aboard Vernier's ship—the Frenchman who had been off the Jamaica coast a short month ago! Buccaneers in all truth.

"Well, so much the worse for Cap'n Vernier," observed O'Brien pleasantly, "since I ha' most pressing need of his ship and crew—French and English, no doubt. Ho, hum! I think I'll turn in—and let destiny bide until the morrow. A pleasant good night to you, Cap'n Vernier!"

Chuckling softly, he went below, with a snatch of drunken song from ashore to set him on the road to sleep.

II

CAPTAIN RAOUL VERNIER was not a particularly nice person, either in his personality or in his tastes. He was black bearded, barrel chested, his nose had been broken and was askew, and he made no pretensions to gentility. Of St. Malo origin, he was an excellent seaman, extremely brutal, and cautious in a fight. Rather, about getting into a fight, for once in, he was the very devil.

Toward noon he left one of the huts at the side of the old careening ground, and stood stretching himself in the sunlight, his head rocking after a night of debauch. He was of the general type of his day, which made no concessions to decency of thought or act, and he grinned sourly

as he surveyed the scene of the night's carousal—whose details might well please him, but would please no one else.

Half a dozen of his men were seated about a fire, broiling meat and groaning over their aching heads. Vernier looked about, found a half emptied wine keg, and helped himself from it; then he strode to the fire.

"Four of you lads tumble into a boat and take me out," he said curtly, and passed on toward the boats on the beach. The men looked at one another, grimaced, then four of them followed him with muttered curses.

Vernier halted by a sprawled figure and kicked it twice. It wakened and evolved into a tall and spindly man with enormously long arms and a beak nosed face—his lieutenant, Rocher, once a French officer and a gentleman, now drunken and given over to the devil with no hope.

"Come aboard with me, Rocher," Vernier ordered contemptuously. Rocher stumbled after him.

The four men got a boat afloat and tumbled in. Vernier and Rocher followed, and they were taken out to the brigantine; naturally they saw nothing of the pinnace, which floated on the other side of her. When they came to the dangling ladder, Vernier turned to his four men.

"You needn't wait—I'm stopping aboard," he said. "Take those wenches in the huts, if you want them. All hands ready to come aboard two hours before sunset, mind. And no women."

"Eh, Captain?" said Rocher, staring at him. "But you promised to land the women at Tortuga! You can't leave them here."

"To the devil with them," said Vernier, and mounted. "Come on."

Rocher shrugged and followed him. Most of Rocher's life was a shrug, these days—he who had been a brilliant officer of French artillery. Vernier glanced at the one legged watchman, still snoring, and strode aft.

"Come down to the big cabin," he said. "We'll have to arrange our plans, and I want to look over the jewels and gewgaws we took out of the Spaniard—before the men see the stuff."

"A drink first—water," said Rocher. "My head's splitting."

He went to the water butt forward. Vernier passed on down the companionway.

When he entered the main cabin he came to a dead halt, and stood there stupefied at sight of O'Brien, who was sitting at the big table. O'Brien laid down his pipe, rose, and bowed with a certain dignified grace that told its own story. His hair was drawn back and powdered; he was wearing a flowered waistcoat and a suit of sky-blue silk; diamond buckles glittered at his knees and upon his shoes, and the jeweled rings on his fingers were half concealed by the rich Mechlin lace of his cuffs. On the table before him lay two ornate pistols, lately loaded, and a gold hilted Spanish rapier, out of its scabbard.

"Good day, Captain Vernier; good day!" he said. "I must apologize for my rusty French, which has suffered from undue repose in the Virginia plantations."

"Who in the devil's name are you?" blurted out the astounded buccaneer. O'Brien bowed again, and flicked a handkerchief over his lapel.

"Oh, yes! Allow me; Colonel James O'Brien, late regimental commander in the forces of his Majesty, King James, more recently aide-major of the Irish Brigade, serving his Majesty, King Louis; more recently yet, staff officer in the service of his Majesty, the King of Sweden—"

"Death of a thousand devils!" exploded Vernier. "Where did you come from? What madness is this? How did you get here?"

O'Brien paused. In the doorway behind Vernier, now appeared Rocher, and the eyes of the two men sat. The face of the Frenchman became overspread by a mortal pallor. He caught at the door as though he were about to collapse. O'Brien, ignoring him, turned to Vernier again, a slight smile upon his lips.

"Where did I come from? Why, my dear Vernier, from hell! Hark'ee: I

sneaked back to Ireland to see a dying mother; they recognized me, caught me, sent me as a slave to the plantations! First Virginia, then to Jamaica—and on the way back to Virginia, when the Spaniards turned up and plumped me into a new slavery. From which, praise be, I delivered myself. And what madness is this? For you, a most unfortunate madness. How did I get here? Faith, my dear fellow, the devil caught me up under his arm and carried me just here—plumped me down in this cabin to await you! If you doubt it, look at these loaded pistols and this excellent rapier, placed so ready to my hand. There's a whole biography for you—aye, and your own destiny to boot, if you but knew it!"

His lightly mocking tone, his air of being completely at home, and perhaps a certain glint in his blue eye, brought a scowl to the face of Vernier.

"What do you want here?" he said harshly.

The blue eyes struck squarely on his, and the jesting voice became like steel.

"Your life," said O'Brien. "Your ship; your men—or some of them. You're the scoundrel who sacked Santa Margerita early this year, murdered women, carried others to the Tortugas; you're no man but a beast, to be treated as such."

Without taking his gaze from O'Brien, Vernier spoke quietly in Spanish.

"Get the men aboard, Rocher," he said, and then took a step forward, hand to belt. "Whoever you are, you damned popinjay, and however you got here, strip off those clothes and get for'ard, unless you want to be triced up and given a score of lashes!" His voice was imperious, harsh, brutal. "Off with 'em, hear me?"

O'Brien shrugged slightly. Rocher, in the doorway, had not moved; was staring at O'Brien.

"You mistake, Vernier," said the latter calmly. "You are not giving orders here. I am. Take one of those swords from the rack behind you—" And, reaching forward, he picked up the rapier, springing it slightly in his hands as he spoke. "Quick, man! Would you have me spit you like the dog you are, without a fight?"

Vernier half turned, with a sneer, as though to obey. Then, quick as light, his hand moved. A knife was in the air, swift as an arrow, singing straight for O'Brien's throat. The rapier swept up and around; the knife, deflected, clanged against the stern post and fell to the deck.

WITH the throw Vernier lunged forward, flung himself half across the table to seize one of the pistols there; then he choked and strangled, and his body relaxed. It slipped from the table and crashed down on the floor, and threshed there for an instant or two, hand clutching at throat, all crimsoned. O'Brien looked at the reddened point of his rapier, and with a grimace wiped his handkerchief along the blade, then dropped the bit of lace distastefully.

"O'Brien!" burst out the voice of Rocher, who took a step into the room as he spoke. "You!"

O'Brien looked up, and warm friendliness lighted up his face. With a quick step he was around the table, catching the other man in his arms, gripping his hand.

"By all that's holy, my old friend the Vicomte de St. Rocher!" he cried out heartily. "I thought it was you, but had to keep my eyes on that rascal. St. Rocher! Remember the Boyne water, and how we stood against the Dutchman while the coward who led us was fleeing? And how we met in Riga—you were in the Polish service then, I think? Faith, this is a strange meeting, old comrade!"

"But—but you—look at you—and at me," stammered Rocher, passing a hand across his gaunt, unshaven face. Shame flooded into his eyes, and bitterness. O'Brien pressed his hand quickly.

"Nonsense, my lad! You should ha' seen me when I slipped aboard here last night. That pinnace of mine is still alongside, with three dead men in her. We were sold to Virginia again, after a year on Jamaica, but a Spaniard took the

bark we were in and carried us down to the south, and there was the devil and all to pay. They put in for water at some island, and the four of us got cleared wi' the pinnace, then the Indians jumped us—it's not nice to think of, let me tell you; I don't like arrows. They near finished us all, but we got clear and rigged a sail—and here I am. What luck to find you!"

"*Diantre!*" Rocher stood back, staring at him. "You don't mean that—you're not alone?"

"Not while you're here, St. Rocher."

"I'm not that," said the Frenchman. "I'm plain Rocher the buccaneer, lieutenant of this ship, scoundrel, child of misfortune, stepson of crime—"

"Oh, devil take your nonsense!" broke in O'Brien, clapping him on the back. "Vicomte de St. Rocher, ally and lieutenant and friend o' Jack O'Brien—and we've work to do, me lad!" The warm glow in his eyes broke into a sparkle of whimsical humor. "You and I have to get away with this craft, for I've big news in my head. Away with you now; get shaved and into gentleman's clothes, and join me here after I finish my pipe. Time enough to talk later."

Rocher disappeared, looking dazed and bewildered, as well he might.

O'Brien did not resume his pipe, however. He went to the side of Vernier, who was quite dead, and stood looking down at the brutal face.

"So you preferred murder to fair fight, eh?" he mused aloud. "It's like you, you damned woman killer. But there—" he sighed—"I mustn't let my feelings run away with me. After all, you're dead, and that's the main thing. Now you can serve my purpose a bit further."

He picked up the body in his arms, heavy as it was, and strode out to the companionway and so on deck. Walking to the break of the poop he dropped Vernier's body into the waist, and turned away.

Back in the cabin again he took a weapon belt he had found, buckled it about his waist, and was presently girded with sword and pistols like any buccaneer. Then he set out wine and food on the table, and turned at a step to see Rocher—a changed man.

Pale was the Frenchman, newly shaven, wearing bits of the finery from the other cabin—and a glow in his dark eyes such as had not been there for many a day. He held out a hand to O'Brien and stood smiling.

"It's not a dream, then," he said softly. "You, my Colonel—"

"Down with you, Vicomte, and get some food and drink under your belt," exclaimed O'Brien, pressing the other into a seat. "There's long years to cover with our tongues, but we've not time for it now. Other things press. I wanted a ship, and got her—but I didn't look for a friend. Praise be, fortune's kind! Here's to the future—and revenge!"

"To the future!" exclaimed St. Rocher solemnly, and his eyes kindled as he drank the toast.

They ate rapidly, looking at each other as men will after long parting, with conjecture and surmise, noting the passage of time in the marks it has left. Each man realized that there would be bitter spots in the tale, heart searing places; no place for confidences now, with brusk action in the offing. O'Brien shoved away the wine chalice and reached for the long clay pipe.

"Don't you smoke? You'll come to it. Well, what's the temper of your crew? Good men?"

St. Rocher grimaced.

"Beasts like their master. Vernier owned the ship; a planter friend of his at Basse-terre helped to found her. She's paid well. Three months and not a dernier; two days ago we took a Spaniard—sunk him, but cleaned him out first. There are some gold ingots and some silver bars under our feet in the lazaret; the men have much coin."

"Prisoners?"

"Vernier took none."

O'Brien nodded.

"And the men themselves? They're not all French."

"Over half are. Out of the hundred and twenty, we have a score of Dutchmen and

others, a few Portugee rascals, and twenty-odd English and Irish. The others are all French or Canadian."

"Hm! Brethren of the coast?"

"No. Recruits on shares. An organized affair, my dear Colonel."

O'Brien puffed at his long stemmed pipe for a space.

"Think you they'll take my orders without persuasion?"

"You know how such men are, my friend."

"And you know who the chief men of this crew are. Hm! Have you a signal to call a boat?"

"Yes—the flag."

"Set the signal, then. It's a nuisance we're so far from shore. You go ashore and pick thirty men—the ones you can best trust. Fetch them aboard, with both the boats. No others!"

"And what shall I tell them?"

"That Captain Vernier wants them instantly for special work."

With a shrug, St. Rocher rose and departed.

O'Brien got the charts from their rack and spread them on the table, finishing his pipe as he studied them. Leaving one outspread, he replaced the others and then sauntered up on deck. A boat was coming out from shore, and St. Rocher, in the waist, was talking with the one legged man. O'Brien beckoned this latter and the man stumped up to the poop, staring blankly. "Come below, my man."

III

SEATED in the cabin, O'Brien refilled his pipe and looked at the seaman who stood before him.

"Your name?"

"Piggoty, sir—Jem Piggoty o' Norfolk. I be the master gunner, sir."

"You're a long way from home—" and O'Brien smiled thinly. "Well, Piggoty, you've probably taken note that Cap'n Vernier has passed to his reward—a just one, I hope. You talked in your sleep last night. I gather that you had no love for Vernier?"

"Not a scrap, sir. A main black brute, he was."

"And you an honest God fearing seamen, I've no doubt." Under the cold blue eyes and the thin irony, Piggoty shifted his wooden peg uneasily. "You continue master gunner, my lad. Under the larboard counter, there's a pinnace wi' three men in her, dead. Go and drop Vernier's body into her. When Vicomte de St. Rocher comes aboard with the men he brings, point out the body to them and tell them that Colonel O'Brien is now in command of this ship. That's all."

"Aye, sir." Piggoty touched his forelock and stumped away.

O'Brien remained where he was for some time, until he caught the thudding of boats alongside and the murmurous sound of voices and bare feet pounding the deck. Then he rose and went up the ladder, and came out in the bright sunlight.

St. Rocher was just mounting the poop ladder. Along the larboard rail were thronged some thirty blowsy ruffians, staring down at the pinnace and talking excitedly. Of a sudden they saw O'Brien standing at the poop rail, with St. Rocher beside him, and their faces turned to him, blinking in surprise and wonder.

"Good morning, my lads," said he blithely. "Those who understand English, lift your hands."

A score of hands lifted, then fell again, rather foolishly.

"Fair enough," said O'Brien. "As ye've learned, this is now my ship. You're my men. The gold and silver that's aboard will be divided among you—I'll have no share. I know where there's enough more to make us all rich men, and we're going to get it. Where's the bosun?"

"He's ashore, sir," said a voice.

"Leave him there, then, with the others. Piggoty, select a capable bosun."

"Couldn't have a better, sir, than this Hobbs, sir." Piggoty pointed out a massive, scowling fellow with a red beard.

"Hobbs, you're bosun," said O'Brien quickly. "Rating as such, with five shares

out of the loot. Man the capstan, get up the anchor and that stern kedge, bring in the boats, then tail on the lines and we'll move out of here. Once out, you men select a committee of three to come aft and settle details with me."

The men gasped, stared up at him, then at one another. Hobbs spoke out.

"Aye, Master? And what of our mates ashore?"

"Leave them there with the wenches until we come back in a fortnight or so," said O'Brien coolly. "You men can be trusted; they can't. There's ticklish fighting ahead of us, lads, and gold for the taking. We're enough for the job."

"Oh, aye?" said Hobbs, with a rising mutter of voices behind him. "And who may you be?"

O'Brien smiled down at them lazily, and flicked a crumb from his silken waistcoat.

"Whoever wants to argue it, can find out, my lads. Why not wait and see? I'm not the man to cruise emptily for three months, take a ship and sink her clumsily, and then put into Aves for a carouse! Not I. This time a sevennight, you'll be carousing aboard a galleon, one of the plate fleet itself, with gold like dirt around you and every man rich as a lord! Those that don't like the prospect can go ashore with Cap'n Vernier. St. Rocher, take charge for'ard! Hobbs, get your men to the capstan and fetch in the boats."

Mention of the dead Vernier, the evident allegiance of St. Rocher, the alluring prospect held out before them, stirred the upturned faces; but more than all else was the superb coolness and arrogant confidence of this man whose cold blue eyes commanded them, and who had proclaimed himself their master. Added to this was the element of mystery in him, and the fact that most of their company were still ashore. St. Rocher had picked his men well.

Two minutes later the boats were coming in, the capstan bars clicking, and the men laughed as they heard the wrathful shouts of those ashore, who now began to throng the beach in wild and helpless fury. All of them English, Irish or Dutch, they had small love for their Latin comrades.

O'Brien was still at the poop rail, watching, when a wizened, blear eyed man with ragged hair and beard broke away from the others and stood staring up at him.

"*Mhuire a-struagh!*" came the fellow's voice in Irish. "Is it yourself, Shamus O'Brien? And do you remember the breach at Limerick town, and Phelim who served your mess?"

O'Brien was down the ladder with a rush, and wringing the man's hand.

"So it's you, Phelim—what a rascal you were, eh? The best thief in all the regiment! Aye, I remember well enough. Where've you been since then, my lad?"

The other grimaced.

"A plantation slave, Shamus O'Brien, until I cut the Englishman's throat and ran for it. Praise be, it's a glory to the eyes to see you, sir!"

"Then tell your mates they need have no shame in sailing with me," said O'Brien quickly. "And once out of this, you'll be cabin steward, Phelim. Enough for now."

There was laughter in his eyes and in his soul as he walked the poop and saw the canvas flutter up, amid shrill and furious yells from the beach. St. Rocher for lieutenant, and one man whom he could trust from of old. Aye, fortune had favored him with full hand.

He ordered the pinnace cut adrift and left to float ashore, to tell her story, as the brigantine slipped from the cove and then heeled to the freshening breeze. The pleasant Isle of Aves fell away from behind them.

Presently three men came down to the great cabin where O'Brien and St. Rocher awaited them—red bearded Hobbs, stumping Piggoty, and a keen eyed Dutchman they called Dunker. O'Brien had doffed his weapons, but the Spanish rapier lay on the table before him, a splendid blade.

"Sit down, men; take your ease," he said, waving his long stemmed pipe

at seats. "We're all comrades; but fix it in your heads that we're not all equal. I'm giving the orders. Now, there's sharp work to be done, and not many hands to do it."

"Cursed few there be for fighting," growled Hobbs.

"Aye?" O'Brien looked at him, smiling. "There are two-score and ten good men waiting for us, Hobbs—English and Irish all. Listen, now! A week ago I was in Spanish hands, d'ye see? And got away. The dons took two ships out of Jamaica for the Virginias, with prisoners for the plantations, Irish and English all—blown off the course, we were. The Spaniards meant to take us to the mines, Catholics or not, for it's small mercy they show any man. They were making for Chagres and Panama, but we met a craft with news that a galleon of the plate fleet had lost her rudder and been sore battered, and lay at Margarita for repairs. So our good ship headed thither. And thither go we, my hearties."

"Aye?" queried Dunker keenly. "With thirty men, Master?"

"With me," said O'Brien. "If I, single handed, could take Vernier's ship and the best of his crew, what can I do with that ship and those thirty men? Tell me that."

They grinned, and he knew he had them.

"Now, St. Rocher and I will work out details," O'Brien went on. "Meantime, trick yourselves out in what Spanish clothes may be aboard—plenty of them, to judge from what I've seen. This craft is named the *Malouin*, I see. Get out your paint pots and change it to read *Sta. Teresa*. We'll have to leave the yards as they are, but rig up some false work on the poop in Spanish style and get it painted. We're sailing into Margarita, my lads, as a Spanish coaster from Hispaniola."

St. Rocher whistled at this.

"They've got a battery on the point there," he pointed out, "and the guns of the fort. And by your own account we'll find two ships, with enough guns to blow us out of the water."

"Aye, but we'll find fifty fighting men to aid us, likewise," said O'Brien gaily. "And no lack of Indians off the coast to give us information, d'ye see?"

"Who's talking the dons' lingo, Master?" demanded Hobbs.

"I am—Don Diego Ramirez, no less." O'Brien smiled at him. "And since you're so full of questions, let me give you a bellyful of information, lads. There'll be no more women aboard this ship, and no women will be harmed by any of you in our takings. Dunker, you'll ha' charge of the rum, to be handed out at my orders only. There'll be no questions when I give orders, on pain of death. Throw your cursed black flag overboard—I'll give you a better, later on. We have three days' sail to Margarita, and I want all shipshape aboard here before then. Are ye suited, my bullies?"

They were.

Alone with his friend, St. Rocher regarded O'Brien with a gleam in his dark eyes, and showed his teeth in a smile.

"*Mon ami*," he said, "what is in your mind?"

"Eh?" The blue eyes regarded him probingly. "You've heard."

"Exactly. I've heard—what the others have heard. But there's more to be told, unless I'm mistaken. Is it so?"

O'Brien looked down at the rapier and fingered it for a moment, and the lines of his face became drawn and old. He looked up at the other man suddenly, and nodded.

"You're right, St. Rocher," he said. "This is but the beginning. I'm aiming higher. This is the middle of April, eh? At the beginning of June I want to be at Guadeloupe."

"Yes? I know the island well."

"The Marquis de Fleury arrives sometime in May, as the new governor," went on O'Brien. "He's some relative of Pontchartrain, I believe; I heard talk about it in Jamaica."

"I happen to know him—or did," said St. Rocher quietly. "A capable man, very. He was in charge of the operations before Nevers."

O'Brien's lips were compressed thinly, so that all the color had run out of them.

"Yes," he said, after a moment. "I had just formed a regiment of the Irish Brigade, then. He was a friend of mine. I had a wife. She was carried off one night. Later, she died."

St. Rocher looked quickly at him, eyes widening. There was a little silence.

"I shall be honored, my friend," said the Frenchman, with grave comprehension, "to lend you my fullest assistance—at Guadeloupe and elsewhere—even to hell itself!"

O'Brien dropped the rapier on the table, drew a quick breath, and smiled.

"You understand? I aim at Guadeloupe. Meanwhile, there are stepping stones."

"You would do well to keep this ship, then," said St. Rocher thoughtfully. "Vernier has a roving commission from the governor—you'll find the document somewhere about."

"I've found it—" O'Brien smiled again, but his eyes were like blue ice— "and by its terms the command falls to you if Vernier is killed or hurt."

St. Rocher's lips curved a little.

"So!" he murmured. "It promises well, provided there is no stumbling—over the stepping stones."

"Faith—" O'Brien laughed out—"I've learned not to stumble, my friend! Lay our course for Margarita, and leave the rest to me. Men and gold I must have, to come at my revenge later—so we sail to Guadeloupe by way of Margarita!"

IV

MARGARITA—ravaged by Captain Vaugon's filibusters ten years afterward, and later quite destroyed by earthquake, and abandoned—was in those days a pretty place, built as it was at the mouth of the Santos River, with the hills behind.

Up the river and in the valleys were the fertile lands of rich *haciendados*. Enslaved Indian labor was plentiful at this period, before the pestilence had wiped out Indian and Spaniard alike, letting the rich fields relapse into jungle. The little port was small but afforded perfect protection, for a wide sandspit, engulfed at the time of the earthquake, ran out and curved about to help form a harbor. The white buildings along the rising shore, the plaza and church on the plateau above, the sheds and boat works on the beach, and the square stone building beyond, where silver from all the district was smelted down for the royal treasury, afforded a scene of activity and delight; the town looked much larger than it really was, indeed.

At the end of the sandspit was a battery of six twenty-pound carronades, so placed as to command either the channel or the harbor itself. Above the beach on the first rise of ground lay the fort, a solid stone structure, whose heavy guns had the whole of the harbor at their mercy.

In the harbor lay a few fishing craft and numerous Indian *pirogues*, over which towered the massive rising bulk of the *Santiago* galleon. She had been warped in as close as might be for the repairs, which were now practically finished. Beyond her lay the *San Martin*, the Spanish craft which had brought O'Brien and his fellow captives into these waters, a faster and trimmer ship, built for fighting alone. She was newly arrived from Spain, while the galleon was bound thither.

On the beach below the fort was a long double row of thatched huts—*barracoons* for the slaves, white or black or Indian, who labored on the rising bastions of the fort and on the new buildings of the town. The better part of these slaves were now white, being the crews and lading of two Virginia bound bark carrying plantation slaves; and now slaves and masters alike, Jacobites or no, were cast together into a more desperate and hopeless slavery.

There was little care spent in watching them. They were safe enough by day, and toward sunset were marched to their huts, fed, and then ironed by the overseers, whose dwelling, a small fort in itself, was at the end of the line of huts.

Self-sustaining, prosperous, a little out of the world even for this New World, Margarita had no worries; and her governor, Don Augusto Gonzalez, was very much his own master. At the present moment, the town had all the aspect of a *fiesta*, for every house held guests and the fort was crammed, and the governor's palace itself filled to the doors with nobility. All the soldiers from the galleon, a full hundred of them, were living ashore, and so were her two-score passengers—officials and their families, gentlemen, friars, returning to Spain and glad to spend this time ashore while the repairs were being made. Only her working crew remained aboard the *Santiago*, while the *San Martin* was even emptier, most of her complement being down with scurvy and encamped ashore.

Thus were matters on the day of the governor's ball—a grand *fiesta* to be held that same evening in the *palacio* on the plateau, in farewell to the chief guests. For, in two days, the galleon would be outward bound once more on her long voyage to Spain; she had been hauled out into deep water, and all this day the slaves had worked refilling her water butts with clear water.

It was an hour before sunset when the *Sta. Teresa* was sighted, standing about Cape Formo with evident intent to make Margarita. Her rig caused swift alarm; bugles shrilled, drums beat, men ran to battery and fort, and the magazines were opened—she might be one of a filibuster squadron. The *San Martin* was brought around with her starboard broadside to bear on the channel.

The visitor, however, proved to be alone, and the alarm was stilled. The flag of Spain was seen at her main, scarce a dozen men were visible on her deck, and Don Augusto sent out a pilot to fetch her in; with the light air, she could not drop anchor before dark, so *flambeaux* and torches were ordered out, and the stately don went down to meet her captain at the landing.

Aboard her, O'Brien received the half-breed pilot with polite Spanish phrases and turned over the wheel to him. The men on deck were all Dutchmen, who spoke Spanish fluently; and O'Brien soon heard of the governor's *fiesta* and all else. He presently drew St. Rocher aside and spoke with him softly, as the little harbor opened out.

"See to it yourself," he concluded. "Don't trust one of our men to act independently, except Hobbs. You'd better aim those guns yourself; double shot them, to get her spars with the first broadside. Run up a lantern the minute you're back aboard, and I'll be ready."

The pilot laid the brigantine exactly where O'Brien wanted her—between the battery on the sandspit and the *San Martin*. Beyond the latter, under the guns of the fort, lay the great galleon. From the Spaniards' point of view, the newcomer was safely boxed.

Not that there was any suspicion of her, now. Indeed, there could be none after Don Diego Ramirez y Ribera stepped ashore and announced himself, with profound bows, to the governor. In some fashion his severe elegance outshone all the glitter of Don Augusto and his officers. The light of the *flambeaux* touched up ruddily his gorgeous black velvet with the richest of lace at throat and cuffs, his one jewel, the magnificent gold hilted rapier; and above, his bleached and powdered hair, and the bronzed face with the blue eyes.

"*Verdamente!*" ran the mutter through the crowd that gaped around. "*Viejo Cristiano!* One of the ancient Gothic blood!"

Don Augusto was impressed, and welcomed Don Diego most warmly. Then the visitor checked him, and looked him in the eye with some intentness. A few questions to the pilot had served him well.

"Is it possible, señor don," he demanded, "that you are of the Gonzalez family of Estramadura, of the strain of Aguilar that goes back to the ancient glories of the cave of Covadonga?"

"That is indeed the boast of my family, señor—" Don Augusto beamed.

"Embrace me, my more than cousin!" cried Don Diego with stately pride. "For you must know that we are indeed cousins of a sort, my father's sainted wife having been the offshoot of your glorious race! Have I not heard my worthy parent declaim upon the honor of this alliance with the house of Gonzalez? Closer are we than cousins. Indeed, we are brothers in blood and pride!"

Don Augusto was more than delighted, but as a matter of duty bethought to ask about papers. Don Diego snapped his fingers.

"Papers! I have none, good cousin—and why? Because a rascally filibuster laid me aboard two days out of San Domingo—you have doubtless observed the marks of his shot aboard us. Aye, and captured us, rifling our ship of everything; but he was dealing with a Ramirez y Ribera, let me tell you, and the noble blood of Gonzalez and Ramirez could not brook the affront. That same night I got free and overpowered him and his men. True, I did not get my goods back, for his ship was separated from us in the storm; but at least I had the pleasure of hanging him! And I have half a dozen of his rascally crew aboard. May I have the honor of presenting them to you for hanging?"

Here was news; great news. Don Augusto even forgot his *fiesta* momentarily, demanding the name of the filibuster.

"Some scoundrelly Frenchman—Vernier, I believe. Is there such a one?"

Was there, indeed! *Por los clavos de Cristo!* Don Augusto embraced his guest and cousin with new warmth. That scourge, that unspeakable beast, that louse of a Vernier—overcome by a cousin, an uncle, a very brother Gonzalez! The news provoked a tumult in the crowd, a clamor of wild delight, and Don Diego turned nonchalantly from the ovation to point to the boat just coming in.

"Here are the rascals, good cousin," he exclaimed. "See, I present them to you freely. Hang them or use them as slaves, at your pleasure."

Acclamations, *vivas*, filled the evening air as the huge, red bearded Hobbs and half a dozen of his fellows were trundled ashore and rescued by the governor's guards from the onslaught of the crowd. When he had inspected them, Don Augusto summoned a lieutenant of his guard.

"Place them in the slave quarters for tonight, señor," he commanded, "and leave them bound as they are—the dogs will not be hurt by tight ropes. In the morning we shall settle their fate. Come, my heroic cousin, you are my guest. I shall be honored in presenting you to the commander of yonder galleon, the Conde d'Aguilar, and to his officers and my own. My house is yours, and in honoring you I do myself untold honor!"

So, with the delighted Don Augusto at his side and the torches and guards round about, Don Diego Ramirez y Ribera was marched up to the *palacio* to become the guest of honor at the *fiesta* and to receive the stately felicitations of a score of stately Spanish men upon his great feat. If black eyed Spanish ladies fluttered and pressed about him likewise, they found his high courtesy and ready tongue as notable as his deeds at arms.

HOBBS and his five companions, meanwhile, were marched up to the slave *barracoons* and with many a kick and cuff, were hurled into a hut where miserable chained wretches already occupied the foul ground. Their feet were bound, and they were left until the morning.

"All safe, bullies?" said Hobbs in the darkness, and the others assented. A voice spoke out.

"Be ye Englishmen or not?"

"Aye," said Hobbs, with a chuckle. "And you?"

"Slocombe, o' the bark *Powhatan*, from the Virginia capes."

"Then stow your jaw, Master Slocombe, till I get rid o' these cursed ropes. We ha' files hid in our shoon and knives in our breeches, my bully, and a good ship awaiting. Stow the jaw, Master, for there's work ahead."

Now arose curious sounds from the long

double row of huts where lay fifty-odd white men and a score of Caribs—low, hoarse voices, and the steady scrape of files on iron, and now and again that of a broken link. None of these sounds reached the guards and overseers in their own quarters, however; music drifted to them from the *palacio* and the town, and they had a girl or two of their own, and wine as they willed it; so who were they to bother with the safely ironed slaves in this night of celebration?

In the fort and the town was dancing, and the two taverns were crowded. Lanterns strung about the plaza lighted great merrymaking before the church doors. From the *palacio* came the sounds of fiddle and bassoon; and there was a glitter of uniforms and gay silken gowns. And the envious sentries on the fort walls had more eyes for the *fiesta* than for aught amiss beyond. Even in the battery there was drinking and the twang of a guitar, for the dozen men left there had no minds to miss all the fun.

Miss it they did, however. Out of nowhere suddenly appeared a tall, cadaverous man all in black, with immensely long arms and a pistol at the end of each, who commanded them to stand up and make no sound. Before they could collect their wits, other men poured in upon them, triced them up, gagged them, and then set to work spiking the carronades of the battery.

With not a shot fired, St. Rocher led his men back to their boat and was set aboard the brigantine, where he hoisted a lantern to the main yard. The boat, with eight men in her, crept ashore to the landing and waited there, a lantern ready but hid under a cloak.

Aboard the galleon and the *San Martin*, likewise, was music and wine, but no true gaiety for lack of female company. There was none to see the shadowy figures that flitted down from the slave *barracoons* to the beach, and there flitted aboard *pirogues* and boats, as directed by a huge man with a red beard. In all this part of the business was only one bit of ill luck—when a half drunken overseer stumbled out of his quarters and started off to find a certain wench of his acquaintance, and ran slap into a number of those flitting figures whom he had been wont to lash by day. That, however, was his ill luck, not theirs, as was proven when his body was found next morning.

Amid the merriment and feasting, meantime, was Don Diego Ramirez y Ribera, seated on the left of the governor, on whose right sat the Conde d'Aguilar. Worthy Don Augusto, full of Spanish pride and Xeres wine, blinked rapidly when Don Diego leaned over and whispered in his ear.

"Say you so, indeed, my cousin?" he returned under his breath. "A real treasure?"

"Hush!" said Don Diego sternly. "Not here. Can we speak a little apart?"

"Of a surety,"—and Don Augusto excused himself from the festive board, pleading a trifle of official business with his heroic cousin which could not well be put off.

Once outside, in the cool night air of the terrace outside the *palacio*, he turned to his guest.

"But you did not mention this treasure before, Don Diego!"

"It was for your ear alone, good señor don!" returned the hero. "Besides, it is a matter to discuss in private—whether it should be turned in to your agent of the royal treasurer, or otherwise disposed."

"Hm!" said the governor thoughtfully. "That depends upon its size, my cousin."

"Chests of it!" said Don Diego with enthusiasm. "There is a whole chest filled with pieces of eight, another of jewels—"

The governor caught his arm.

"What? A real treasure?"

"Aye. What say you, my honored cousin—would you care to inspect it? I ordered a boat to await me at the landing. We might go over it together and arrange its division, if such be your pleasure; we would never be missed—"

"Come, then," exclaimed the governor, trembling with eagerness and greed. "You are right, good cousin—this is a

matter for private division. *Dios!* Only one of the Gonzalez strain could show such generosity, such true nobility, such scorn of base metal! Come!"

Don Diego, having seen the lantern at the yard of his ship, did not delay one moment.

Together the two men left the *palacio* and the town; arm in arm they turned their steps toward the landing below. The water was glimmering before them, when Don Diego uttered a soft whistle. The lantern in the waiting boat was uncovered.

At this moment the governor halted abruptly, and his jaw fell.

"What is that?" he exclaimed sharply, pointing toward the harbor. "*Nombre de Dios!* Am I mad, or do you see it also, my cousin?"

"See what, señor don?"

"That!" The governor pointed toward the dark mass of the galleon, rising huge before them. "She is moving. Listen! There are men's voices—there is fighting aboard her—"

Something struck him under the ear, and he toppled forward into the waiting boat.

"Give way, lads!" exclaimed O'Brien, as he leaped in. "No time to lose now—"

Aboard the galleon flamed out a shot, then another. A wild chorus of voices leaped out from her decks, and the clash of steel came clanging over the water.

A sentry on the fort fired his piece, as did another. Above the music and gaiety rose the sounds of alarm; a bugle broke in with shrill, strident blare, and a drum began to roll. Lights sprang on the deck of the *San Martin*, voices shouted forth. The great galleon, indeed, was moving, half a dozen boats strung ahead of her, towing, while wild figures streamed aloft and let go canvas.

The boat swept in under the counter of the *Sta. Teresa*, and O'Brien swarmed up the waiting ladder. He saw slow-matches along the deck, red points in the darkness.

"St. Rocher!" rang out his voice. "Let go, man, let go!"

"Waiting for you, *mon ami*," came the voice of the Frenchman. "Fire, lads!"

The larboard broadside erupted flame and smoke with a shattering roar. As the deck reeled men leaped to the capstan; there was a clink of pawls, a sharp patter of feet, hoarse, panting voices growling oaths. The ship swung about slowly, steadily, until St. Rocher cried out an order.

A moment later the starboard broadside crashed out terribly. Before the echoes died, before the staggering ship came to an even keel, men were leaping aloft, shaking out the topsails to catch the light upper wind; while, from the riven and shattered *San Martin* came, not the roar of broadsides, but the shrieks and terrorized cries of men.

She, at least, would not pursue. And before the missing governor could be found to give orders, the two fleeing ships would be past reach of the guns in the fort above.

As, indeed, they were.

V

IN THE CHILL light of dawn, with the sun not yet up, the two ships came to anchor under the point of Cape Formo.

The prisoners taken aboard the galleon were kicked down into two boats—with oars only—and O'Brien ushered the unhappy Don Augusto to the gangway, amid the grins of his men.

"*Vaya con Dios*, my good cousin!" he exclaimed merrily. "Go with God, and may you not be too sun blistered ere you come into Margarita harbor and explain matters to the excellent Conde d'Aguilar. Pray convey my sympathy to him—"

The wretched governor fled down into his boat, and O'Brien turned to find St. Rocher rigging a gangway from the waist of the brigantine to a midships port of the galleon, and men flocking into the waist of his ship. There was no sea here, and the two craft were moored close.

From the poop rail, O'Brien looked down at the wild, tattered men who so

far outnumbered his own crew—many of them with irons still fast to their wrists, though the chains had been filed or snapped. He lifted a hand to still their wild yells of rejoicing.

"Freedom, my lads, and no more slavery!" rang out his voice, provoking yet another shrill yelp. Then a wild Irish kern swung up both arms and waved them.

"Shamus! Shamus O'Brien!" he yelled, and there was a wild, shrill chorus. "Shamus *abu! Lamh laidir an uachtar!* The Strong Hand above!"

More than one man here knew him, and O'Brien's blue eyes kindled as he heard the old O'Brien war cry ring out.

"Well, my lads, you've pronounced your fate there," he exclaimed, a whimsical twist to his lips. "The Strong Hand above—aye; and those of you who sail with me will find it true enough, and heaven help ye! Now, then, to business. How many of ye want to sail under me?"

Another chorus of shouts, and waving arms; but there were some who shouted not, nor waved.

"Hear me, now—" his voice quelled them. "We'll fall to work looting everything out of the galleon yonder, which will take us most of the day or more. All hands on the job. Then, those who so desire, will sail with me. Those who do not can take the galleon and welcome, and I'll sail with her as far as Dominica or Port Royal, to see her safe. The Indios will want to take a boat now and steal ashore, and let them do it if they will. As to the galleon's loot—" he paused—"ten shares out of a hundred go to me, another ten to Vicomte de St. Rocher, five to the bosun and master gunner, and the balance is divided among ye. What's aboard us already belongs to my original crew."

There was a riotous approval, amid which Hobbs stepped forward.

"What about our mates, back there on Aves Isle, Master?"

"Why—" O'Brien laughed—"we'll go back and pick them up, and we'll set them ashore at Dominica. How's that, eh? I want none o' them in my crew. So get to work, now—hatches off! Larboard watch, remain here to stow cargo; take charge of them, St. Rocher. I'll go aboard with the others and strip out cargo—or what we want of it."

A half dozen men came to him as he stepped into the waist—the English officers of the two barks taken by the *San Martin*. Captain Slocombe faced him, bluntly enough.

"If ye meant your words, Master, it was well said. There be some of us who've no liking for service with you, though God knows we owe you deep thanks for takin' us out of bondage."

O'Brien clapped him heartily on the shoulder.

"Enough, Master! No man sails with me against his will. What I said shall stand. The galleon is yours when we've done with her, and I'll lend you what men you need until we're within sail of Port Royal. You'll find enough aboard her after we're through, to repay what you've lost. So fall to work, all hands!"

Fall to work they did, with a will.

All that day they labored shifting cargo, while the bulwarks groaned together and the seas glittered emptily under the hot sun. The freed Indian slaves took a boat and went ashore, but toward sunset appeared a score of *pirogues*, coming stealing out from the coast lagoons, all of them laden down with fruits and green things and fresh meat—gifts for these enemies of Spain.

And all that day O'Brien moved among men who knew him or had known of him from others, and some of them had slaved beside him on Jamaica plantations. When evening came, he and St. Rocher sat alone in the great cabin, with Phelim serving them, and listened to the hatches being battened down and made fast, as they ate and drank.

"Its a great treasure we have aboard here, my Colonel," said St. Rocher thoughtfully.

"Enough to gladden many a heart," said O'Brien.

"But not yours, eh?" The dark eyes

of the Frenchman glittered at him. "What'll you do with this gold and silver, stamped with the royal stamp of the Spanish king, eh?"

O'Brien looked at him for a moment, and nodded.

"I see. Hard to dispose of, eh?"

St. Rocher shrugged.

"Not at Basse-terre, for example. Elsewhere, the English ships have made the seas none too safe for filibusters, and I'd hate to end on Gallows Point, at Port Royal."

O'Brien saw the point. If they returned and landed the treasure in Guadeloupe, whose commission they carried, all well and good; but the planters who had outfitted the *Malouin* would then share in the loot. Elsewhere, they might have difficulty in disposing of it, unless they stood up for New York or Boston, these places being clearing houses for the filibusters.

"You suggest—?" queried O'Brien, frowning slightly.

"Common sense. Petit Guave, on the East Coast, is the rendezvous and outfitting point at Guadeloupe. There are bankers and agents there, whom I know personally, who'll take over the gold—and no questions asked. We can land the stuff taken by Vernier on the regular account, and turn over our own stuff for your account. I'll act as captain, vice Vernier. Then we can sail around to Basse-terre, get our credits and cash from the bankers, less their commission, and do as we want with it. The planters will share in Vernier's loot, but will know nothing of our own. And when we've finished our business there—"

"We'll not want to return soon," and O'Brien smiled grimly. "Good enough; you have a head, my friend."

SO, AN HOUR later, they hauled off the land, the two ships, and headed for the Isle of Aves. How much treasure they had taken out of the galleon, O'Brien did not know in round figures. It was no enormous and spectacular haul, for the greater part of her lading had been useless to him; but it was enough to start his name flying through the middle seas, once the news of his exploit got out.

There was no further question, either among the old men or the new, as to his authority. This was settled for all time; he installed a discipline aboard the ship which was rigid, and was as great a gentleman on his own quarterdeck as the Conde d'Aguilar. Since this was no affectation but the man himself, the crew respected him the more for it. And the change in the lieutenant was tremendous. Become the Vicomte de St. Rocher once more, no longer a drunken, hopeless wastrel, but a gentleman with a sword at his side and new keenness in his eye, this Frenchman was in all truth a new man. He fenced each morning with O'Brien in the ship's waist, spending an hour or more at it. Despite his long arms, he was invariably worsted, but the pair kept up their sport with a dogged insistence which came in time to fetch knowing looks and significant winks from the watching men. Some reason for it, they gathered—not quite guessing that O'Brien was getting his rusted muscles and eye in shape for particular work ahead.

At Aves they found, without any chagrin, that their birds were flown; another ship had obviously stopped here and picked up Vernier's men. They halted also at the careening ground on the northern beach, and while the galleon rested at anchor, all hands fell to scraping the foul bottom of the *Malouin*, whose name was likewise restored—temporarily.

Off again at last, and there came a day of pleasant weather when the blue hills of Jamaica lifted over the horizon. Dangerous ground, this, for filibusters, with the king's ships thickly about; so, shaking hands with Slocombe and his dozen men, O'Brien took his own men back again and parted company with the galleon, heading up for Petit Guave. An hour later the topsails of a king's ship lifted over the horizon with a white squall, but the *Malouin* dropped her again long ere sunset.

Colonel James O'Brien was rapidly becoming a navigator, thanks to his lieutenant. St. Rocher, pupil of Vauban and skilled artillerist, had found navigation a simple matter, and passed on his instruction readily to O'Brien. Unusual as this might be, in a day when such matters were left to professional pilots as beneath the dignity of gentlemen commanders, it was a distinct advantage; and when, one evening, O'Brien announced that they would raise the hills of Guadeloupe next day, his lieutenant nodded assent.

"Right. And now that it's all close at hand, my Colonel—does it look different?"

O'Brien's blue eyes were like ice.

"Very different, St. Rocher; very different. We can plan nothing, however, until we land and get the news."

"Eh? You don't mean that you'll give up your ideas about the yardarm?"

O'Brien smiled grimly.

"My dear fellow, I never give up ideas. I merely enlarge them. Will you muster all hands directly after dinner?"

They gathered in the waist, staring up at the poop rail, where O'Brien stood slim and elegant in his black velvet.

"Men," he said directly and simply, "we land tomorrow at Petit Guave. The gold taken by Vernier will be turned over to the account of the *Malouin* in the usual fashion. We'll go on to Basse-terre, and you who sailed with Vernier will get your money there from the agents. The gold from the galleon, however, is another matter. Say nothing of it. This will be handled separately, and your share will come to you at Basse-terre also. From the moment we sight Petit Guave, I no longer exist. M. de St. Rocher becomes your captain. Say no word of me ashore. Only Vernier's men will land at Petit Guave, mind that. We've work to do at Basse-terre, and the men who go ashore with M. de St. Rocher tomorrow night had best keep a close tongue or we'll all be hanged. Hobbs, you'll have charge of the shore boat. I'll depend on you."

"Aye, sir," returned the boatswain.

At sunset next evening they dropped anchor in the bight of Petit Guave, finding the roads empty of other ships.

St. Rocher went ashore, and O'Brien, at the forward rail, looked out over the blue and red hills of sunset toward Basse-terre—where the Marquis de Fleury, all unwitting, awaited him.

VI

A LITTLE after dark St. Rocher came aboard, ahead of the boats coming for the gold, and he was filled with news; bursting with it.

"All arranged, my Colonel!" he exclaimed exultantly, coming into the cabin where O'Brien awaited him. "It goes ashore at once, will be weighed and valued tonight, and I'm to be present to check up. We can leave in the morning for Basse-terre—if we do leave for there."

"Eh?" O'Brien gave him a quick glance, pausing in his pipe filling operation. "Why not?"

St. Rocher shrugged.

"Fleury arrived four days ago. He won't take over his duties for a week or more, until the governor sails for France. Meantime, he's visiting with a M. de la Potherie, also a distant connection of Pontchartrain and a relative, who has a large plantation. All our Creole planters are extremely hospitable, my Colonel, keep open house, play for high stakes, and enjoy life to the utmost. There'll probably be a large assemblage at Potherie's plantation, both officers and gentlemen planters."

O'Brien tamped down his pipe, drew over the candle, lighted it, and sank back in his chair.

"Yes?" he said thoughtfully. "It looks different when close up, as you observed. Where is this plantation?"

"About three days' ride to the north, and a few miles back from the sea."

"Hm! Are there post houses in this island?"

St. Rocher broke into a laugh.

"My friend, every plantation is a post house! Travelers are welcomed with the

true Homeric hospitality—welcome the coming, speed the parting, guest. You are thinking of riding north?"

"I am riding north," said O'Brien slowly.

"It was my thought that you might, so I got an advance if you need it." From his pocket St. Rocher brought out numerous *rouleaux* of gold pieces. "I know the island well. I can guide you and we may ride together—"

"Not so," broke in O'Brien. "Three days—hm! Suppose you arrange for horses and a guide, to leave at sunrise. I'll go alone. You take the ship around to Basse-terre and make collections. If you cannot get the sum in cash, as seems unlikely, get bankers' paper on Bordeaux or Paris, which we can always negotiate with any French house. Is this plantation near Basse-terre?"

"No; on the other side of the island. I could bring the ship around in a day's time and send a boat ashore—"

"Excellent!" said O'Brien, with a quick nod. "You may or may not meet with delays at Basse-terre; so as soon as you're ready to leave there, send one of the men who knows the island to report to me at the plantation, by road. He can apprise me of the rendezvous and the time."

"And you? What will you do then—alone?"

O'Brien smiled.

"Faith, my dear chap, how should I know that until the time comes? I think I'll take Phelim with me, to act as my servant. He speaks French and is a resourceful rascal. So it's settled."

And settled it was.

With sunrise, the *Malouin* weighed anchor for Basse-terre, and O'Brien, from the beach, waved her farewell. Then he turned to Phelim, who was getting their baggage lashed aboard a led horse, and nodded to the Creole guide.

"*Allons, mes amis!*"

O'Brien was not long in discovering that what the Creoles called a three day ride, he could have covered in one, if need be—but there was no need. He found himself welcomed at every plantation like a royal guest. The men whom he met on the road pressed him to visit them and would not be refused; all that was theirs was his, in a complete but indolent hospitality. His statement that he was an Irishman in French service, but now on private affairs, ended all queries; he was received as the gentleman he was, and this spirit of magnificent comradeship uplifted him. Soft tongued women, men who dreamed of Versailles and Paris, slaves to anticipate every wish—it was a land of luxury, of rich plantations; a land of tropic ease, in which even the horses drowsed along at a snail's pace and would not be hurried.

Upon the third afternoon they came to the plantation of M. de la Potherie. What was more to the point, they came upon M. de la Potherie himself—an energetic gentleman of fifty, who was hastening his overseers in the repairs of a bridge just outside his estate. Until the bridge was repaired, no coaches could pass—and several coaches were in a devilish hurry, it seemed. The worthy planter welcomed Colonel O'Brien warmly.

"A friend of M. le Marquis? My dear fellow, the house is at your command! You shall have my own room; we are, it is true, a trifle filled at the moment, but there's no lack of space. Yes, your lackey shan't suffer—I'll ride along back with you myself. So you knew M. le Marquis in the field, eh? Ah, a great man, this Fleury! Sagacity—that's what we need in this colonial administration, my dear sir! Look at those fields of sugar cane—what has built them up? Not the wisdom of our governors, I assure you. With M. de Fleury at the head of things, you'll see Guadeloupe forge to the front. But your pardon. You are not upon the staff?"

"A private traveler, no more," said O'Brien. "Has any one been here seeking me? I was looking for a messenger from Basse-terre."

"None, to my knowledge. Come, m'sieu, let us go on to the house."

So they did, and a grand house it was—high ceilinged, of massive hewn mahog-

any, with spacious galleries, and surrounded by gardens and graveled walks. Presently O'Brien found himself installed in the satin walled bed chamber of La Potherie, and his luggage as well. Two slaves and a tub appeared, and he was bathed luxuriously.

Only then did he find himself alone with Phelim, who had opened up the packs. O'Brien chuckled and reached for the fine Spanish linen that had belonged to the Conde d'Aguilar.

"Phelim, me lad—off with ye," he exclaimed. "I've no need of a lackey. Look about, use your wits. Discover where the stables are, where the Marquis de Fleury is lodged—this most particularly. He's spending the day with a neighbor and not back yet. And, Phelim, no drinking, ye scurvy rascal, or it's my whip to your back, mind! Too much depends on sobriety, now. Above all, keep your eyes open for a messenger from the ship."

Phelim departed, grinning widely.

Darkness was gathering and a slave came, lighting the lamps of brass and and crystal. O'Brien dressed with care in the most gorgeous that the galleon had afforded—and surveyed himself in the long mirror with approval. True, he lacked a wig; but in the colonies many gentlemen wore their own hair; and his was most becoming, powdered and drawn back in a silken knot. His deep lace was of the finest. The azure silk suit, picked out with gold, the diamond buckles, the jeweled rings, the splendid order of St. Jago—and, above all, the man himself—proclaimed at once that here was one who had walked with princes. When a slave came to inform him that the company was assembled for dinner, O'Brien followed, sure of his effect.

NOR WAS he deceived. The officers, fresh from France, the wealthy planters and their ladies, fairly gasped at his magnificence, and he adopted the rather lisping, indolent air so much the fashion in France to increase the impression. His entry was something of a triumph, and then, at the far end of the glittering room, he found himself bowing before the Marquis de Fleury.

It came to him, with a shock, how the years had flown.

Here was no trim, elegant cavalier in the uniform of the Gardes Nobles—but a rather pompous man, heavyset, double chinned, imperious of manner, a great curled periwig adorning his head, the stars of St. Louis and St. Michel on his breast; and the powdered face turned white as death when O'Brien straightened from his bow.

"Death of my life!" exclaimed the marquis. "Not my old companion in arms, surely—not my friend O'Brien of the Irish Brigade?"

"The same, your Excellency—" and O'Brien smiled in his gay manner. "Older, it is true, and somewhat less honored, perhaps—but still O'Brien. Do you remember our dicing for English gold on the drum head, that night before Nevers, eh? Do you remember that tavern we found—"

Friendliness! The terror left the eyes of Fleury and with a great laugh he leaned forward, caught O'Brien in his arms, embraced him warmly.

Under the warmth of that embrace, O'Brien shivered.

And now there was talk of this and that—old campaigns, old comrades, dukes and princes and courtiers, and when they dined, the marquis insisted that O'Brien be close to him. It was as though, finding his swift and dreadful fear all groundless, he were pushed to the other extreme, to the utmost friendliness. And in this O'Brien gave him laugh for laugh, toast for toast, compliment for compliment.

Dinner over, there were music and dancing, when the wine and pipes had been finished, and one or two tales recounted that were not for ladies' ears; and straightway the card tables were set out, and the gold began to clink merrily enough. O'Brien played against the marquis, and for a time won heavily, for he scattered wagers with lavish hand.

"You have the devil's own luck, my Colonel!" complained Fleury, with a grimace.

"Unlucky at love, lucky at gaming, monsieur!" But O'Brien's laugh was so merry and light ringing, that the swift glance Fleury shot at him could detect nothing behind the words.

As it chanced, however, O'Brien fell into a losing streak, and presently had gambled away all the gold in his pockets. He rose from the table with a laugh, and a black slave touched his arm.

"M'soo, there is a man outside with your servant, asking for you."

The man was Dunker, the keen eyed Dutchman, who had just arrived from Basse-terre.

O'Brien walked with him and Phelim under the trees, in the starlight, and heard the message. St. Rocher had made his collections in due course, but had been forced to weigh anchor and sail in all haste, that very day. A ship had come in bearing certain of Vernier's men aboard, that morning, and there was trouble that might come to any length; so St. Rocher simply weighed and departed, after sending Dunker on his errand.

"Vernier's men will go to the governor most certainly," said Dunker, "and French waters will be too hot for us."

"They will, that's sure," and O'Brien chuckled. "Go on. The rendezvous?"

"The coast, east of here—there's a road goes to Turtle Bay from here," said Dunker. "We're to be there at noon sharp; a boat will come ashore for us. The weather promises good."

"*Peste!*" O'Brien was startled. "Not much time to act, eh? Good. Listen close, now, for our heads depend on it. How long will it take us to make the rendezvous?"

"I know the trail," said Phelim. "I was up here after turtle last year, Colonel. Afoot, it will take us a good four hours or more. It's the devil's own road, only used by turtle hunters in the season, for no one lives in the hills yonder."

"Good. Then both of you come to my room a trifle before sunrise—the house won't be astir until hours later. And come ready for the road."

O'Brien left them and went back into the gay rooms.

A little later, he contrived to find himself alone with M. de la Potherie. He beckoned that gentleman into a quiet corner and looked him in the eye.

"Monsieur," he said, "I owe you thanks for your hospitality, and as I shall be leaving in the morning, I wish to give you my thanks tonight."

The planter would have pressed him to a longer stay, but the chill blue eyes silenced him.

"That was not all I have to say," went on O'Brien, refusing the proffered snuff box. "There is more. Some years ago, monsieur, a certain gentleman abducted my wife; she died later, of illness and shame. It was as though he had deliberately killed her, but much worse."

Potherie, inexpressibly shocked, expressed quick sympathy. Again his voice died before the blue eyes and the rock hard face of his guest.

"That man, monsieur—" and O'Brien met his eye gravely, "is a guest in your house. When, tomorrow, you discover that one of your guests is missing, you will know why."

"*Diantre!* I'll gladly second you myself, monsieur!" exclaimed the planter heatedly. O'Brien shook his head and said calmly—

"No question here of a duel, my friend, but of an execution."

"Good! Let us speak now to M. le Marquis—as our governor, you understand—"

"Monsieur—"O'Brien bowed slightly—"what I have told you is a confidence between gentlemen, and to excuse what may seem an affront to your hospitality."

"I shall so consider it, monsieur," returned the other. "My only regret is that you refuse my active help."

O'Brien smiled thinly at this, in whimsical amusement.

"Faith, I think you'll have no regret tomorrow! Shall we rejoin the company, monsieur?"

VII

THE DOOR of the stately bed chamber offered no resistance to Phelim's deftly knavish fingers. The three—Dunker was with them—entered. O'Brien went to the high, curtained bed and abruptly flung open the drapes. Then he reached forward and plucked the nightcap from the head of the sleeping man.

Fleury, a bit heavy with wine, had only gone to bed a couple of hours previously. When a knife point pricked his throat, even, he was slow to waken; but the face of the man above him, clear cut in the dawn light, drove reality into his brain.

"M. le Marquis," said O'Brien in a cold voice, "there was something you forgot last night. You forgot to ask after my wife's health. No, I have no intention of putting my knife into your throat; but I shall do it if you call out."

He reached out, caught the coverlets in one hand and flung them back.

"Come, get out of bed!" he ordered harshly.

The great man was robbed of greatness, and knew it. His bald shaved head looked like that of a vulture; his cheeks hung pendulous, red veined, and his teeth chattered with terror. He put both feet to the floor, and so lost his last chance of regaining dignity and courage.

No matter how brave a man may be, only let him be accustomed to boots—and in his bare feet he is a lost man. Besides, terror was mounting in Fleury's heart; a dreadful fear gathering from out the past. When he saw the two silent men looking on, he lost all hope.

"O'Brien!" he quavered, as he sat on the bedside. "I will make amends—"

"That is true . . ." O'Brien smiled grimly. He was clad in his black velvet now, a cloak about his shoulders, a hat beneath his arm. "Phelim! His Excellency's breeches! Nothing else."

"What—what do you mean to do?" stammered the marquis.

"That does not concern you," said O'Brien, as Phelim came with a pair of breeches. "Don these, put on your shoes, and come with me. One cry, remember, and this knife drives into your ribs."

The Marquis de Fleury was well assured that the threat was true.

"Lead the way out, Phelim," ordered O'Brien. "Dunker, take his Excellency's arm, and if he treads too heavily, sink your knife in his *derrière*. March!"

The marquis, in night gown, breeches and shoes, obeyed the commands of this grim specter from his past—this specter who had not forgotten, who was not ignorant, after all.

The four men left the great plantation house and walked down the road. None saw them, for as yet not even the blacks were up and around. The power of an evil conscience left Fleury hesitant and unnerved, until it was too late.

Too late, indeed, when he came to a sudden halt, a half mile down the road, and turned.

"Where are we going?" he demanded heatedly. "What means this masquerade, this folly?"

"You fool!" said O'Brien, looking at him steadily. "Do you think that I will bandy words with you? The knife, Dunker."

A quarter-inch of steel drove into Fleury's hip. He choked back a howl, and thereafter made no effort to summon up his indignation.

They strode on into the sunrise, along a good road which presently crossed another, turned into a trail, and led them among the hills—here a mere footpath. Time passed, but the miles fell slowly behind them, for it was all up hill and down dale, stony and in places dangerous, wending ever toward the sea by circuitous ways. The morning was half spent before they had their first glimpse of the sea, far below and ahead.

And now a dreadful sort of courage had settled upon the Marquis de Fleury. He marched on in silence, bearing himself resolutely enough, a shattered pride creeping back into his flabby cheeks. When they halted at a brook crossing for a drink in lieu of breakfast, he knelt and drank in turn, and rose to look O'Brien in the eye

silent, waiting. His feet, naked in his gaily buckled low shoes, were bleeding.

"Bring him," said O'Brien to the others. "No need to torture him—take it easily. I'll go ahead. If he escapes, you hang."

"He will not escape," said Dunker.

O'Brien strode on ahead of them, spurred by sharp uneasiness. Well enough he knew that by now the search would be on, though none would come this way at first, until other roads had been run down. And this path was interminable. Well, at least they would know why their governor had vanished, and with whom, when M. de la Potherie told his story. A grim smile played about O'Brien's lips as he set feet to the stones.

Then, after another endless hour, he came suddenly out upon a cliff above the sea, where the path zigzagged down perilously to a little rounded, sandy cove, bordered by a wide white beach. It was wearing on toward noon, now.

He stood there, incredulous; the blood leaped into his face, and ebbed again as realization smote him—and cold, sharp dismay.

There, bearing down from the north and running close in to the steep shores, almost within biscuit toss of the cliffs, was the *Malouin*. She was not, indeed, above a half mile distant; and he knew that they had caught sight of him on the cliff, almost instantly. He could see men clustered about a boat, getting it ready, and her white flag, with the golden lilies of France, dipped and was run up again, as a signal from St. Rocher.

It was not at her that he stared, however. The sandy cove below lay in shelter of a promontory of rock, jutting out eastward from the north and south cliffs. Below this sharp headland, to the south, the land fell sharply away in a great sickle sweep of coast. Within this curve, tacking up as though to ram headlong into the cliffs, but in reality waiting to make a sharp tack that would take them out past the promontory, were two ships. They were, perhaps, a mile distant from him, and he could make out every clearcut detail of them there in the white sunlight.

One, evidently the faster of the two and well in the lead, was a smart twenty gun sloop-of-war. The other was a fifty-two gun ship. And both of them flew the red cross of England. He, up there on the cliff, could see both them and the brigantine; but they could not see her, nor she them. And she was running down slap into their hands.

"What the devil!" came an ejaculation behind him. He turned to see Phelim in the lead, just catching sight of the ships below, while Dunker brought up the Marquis de Fleury.

"Captain," said the Dutchman stolidly, "the prisoner has offered us a thousand louis to let him escape."

"Very well," said O'Brien indifferently. "You shall have two thousand for refusing. Make all haste. Dunker, can we signal them?"

"They would but think we were hastening them on," said the Dutchman, and with a suppressed groan, O'Brien knew that it was so. Then he rallied from his dismay.

"Come, then—drive him down!" he called vibrantly, and hurled himself at the sharp descent like a madman. Every minute counted now.

Swiftly the English ships were hidden from him by the headland, as he descended. The boat was coming in, red bearded Hobbs at the tiller. O'Brien remembered how the two ships had been bearing, calculated their speed, knew that the *Malouin* could not possibly slip away from them. There was but one chance—one slim, desperate, utterly mad chance—if he could get aboard her in time. It depended on speed, on action, on luck, on a dozen things—and nothing else could save her. Nor could that, very possibly.

"Faith, why calculate it out?" A laugh broke from him as he came at last to the shingle, and ran down to the sand, where the boat was but fifty feet away. "Play the game and be damned to them—win or lose! Quick, lads—put your backs into it! Two English ships just around the headland—lean on your oars!"

Phelim and Dunker came ploughing along, forcing the sweating, cursing marquis between them. The boat ran in, the prisoner was flung into her bow, and amid a chorus of questions and sharp exclamations, O'Brien leaped to the tiller as she was shoved sharply out.

"Double bank an oar, Hobbs," he commanded. "You, Phelim and Dunker—that's right! Pull, lads—we're caught by two English ships—pull with the devil at your backs! Thank the lord we've got St. Rocher aboard there and not some slow witted fool—pull!"

Not half comprehending, yet sharp spurred by his furious excitement, the men bent on their oars and sent the boat flying through the water. The *Malouin* was close in, for all the cliffs ran down straight into the water, which was steep-to along this coast; and as the swirls of foam fell behind them, O'Brien waved a hand to quiet the yells of greeting going up from the crowded bulwarks ahead.

"St. Rocher!" his voice lifted and was thrown back by the cliffs. "Hurry, man—you're trapped! Drop sail, drop sail—Piggoty, double shot the guns! Jump to it! Down helm!"

The urgency, the stark desperation of his voice, lashed into them. The *Malouin* had been drifting along under backed topsails alone, for there was a smart breeze bearing down behind her. Now her men leaped into life, as O'Brien's voice made the danger clear. Her yards swung around, men swarmed aloft and canvas fell billowing out. The boat foamed in beneath her side and caught a line, and O'Brien went up like a madman, leaving the others to get the prisoner aboard as best they might. St. Rocher met him but there was no time for talk.

"Take the guns, St. Rocher—I'll take the helm! Keep the ports triced up till I give the word—double shot every gun! You take the larboard side—Piggoty, starboard battery! Hurry, lads—up wi' the powder and ball, there!"

"O'Brien!" St. Rocher paused, his dark eyes anxious. "One broadside from them would sink us. We can't hope to run from them—what's your intent?"

O'Brien laughed curtly.

"Faith, since we can neither run nor fight, I mean to do both! To your guns, man!"

And he leaped aft to take the helm, as the sails bellied out and the *Malouin* leaned over to the thrust of them.

"Silence on the decks!" blared O'Brien's voice from the poop. "Cease talking—be ready to jump when I give the order!"

She rushed for the headland as though to crash upon the rocks towering there.

VIII

DUNKER came dragging his miserable prisoner to the poop.

"What'll I do with him, Captain?"

"Lock him in a cabin and get to your station," snapped O'Brien, leaning on the wheel; no eyes now for the Governor of Guadeloupe—every attention was fastened on those high rocks ahead, on the headland for which he was making, his thoughts with those two invisible ships just beyond.

The sea opened out, abruptly he swung the helm, the man beside lending his weight. With the wind dead behind her, every sail drawing full, the brigantine swung up to an even keel and gathered new speed, a foamy bone in her teeth as she hurtled forward. A yelp sounded from the men, then silence—for dead ahead appeared the sloop and the ship-of-war, a scent two cable lengths apart.

"All but the gun crews—down behind the bulwarks!" rang out O'Brien's order, and the men obeyed, albeit sullenly.

For an instant the enemy seemed dazed by this sudden apparition of a ship thus leaping from behind the headland, rushing at them down the wind, the flag of France at her peak—a mere brigantine, which either one of them could sink with one broadside! Then men shouted, whistles shrilled, drums beat, men went rushing to battle stations.

"Ports down!" shouted O'Brien, and the ports fell with a crash and the guns

were run out and made fast. "Aim for their rigging—the sloop is yours, St. Rocher; but await the word!"

Sharp as was the discipline aboard those ships, they had scant time to open magazines, bring up powder, get the guns loaded and run out. Straight in between them headed the *Malouin*, holding the weather gage of them, while marines were hastily flung into rank along their decks and muskets loaded in a wild flurry of haste, faces staring at the apparition.

"Piggoty, hold your fire until I give the word!" rang the voice of O'Brien. "St. Rocher—let her have it!"

They were dead abreast the sloop now, for she was well in the lead. St. Rocher was laying a gun himself; at the word he leaped back, applied the match. The ragged broadside roared out with a shattering crash and the *Malouin* reeled. Men shrieked out, a volley of musketry came with pitiful, feeble reports. A glance showed O'Brien that the sloop was out of it—her fore was down with a splintering crash, and they were past.

And now they were bearing down upon the fifty-two, her gun ports falling as they swept close alongside, her sides towering far above the brigantine.

"All hands—ready to come about!"

O'Brien's voice was hoarse with excitement now. Bullets were flying around them—marines plumping lead into the deck so close alongside. The man beside O'Brien gasped and crumpled, and another sprang to take his place. But not a gun let fire so swift was their coming; they were alongside and past ere the guns were run out.

And, sharp under her stern, O'Brien swung on the helm, the yards swung, and as she came around into the wind, his voice gave the order. Piggoty's guns roared out, with all the towering canvas above for their mark, and rents appeared in the white cloud.

"About!" shouted O'Brien, while the musketry sent bullets whistling over his head. "Ready, St. Rocher!"

St. Rocher was ready, his men furious with swab and charge, and as the *Malouin* swung about and came into the wind again, his guns crashed out. But now the fifty-two had luffed, also, and for a moment the brigantine was under her full broadside, and gun after gun roared. The balls went overhead, for the most part, but one crashed into the midship bulwarks and strewed the deck with dead or groaning. O'Brien stared up to find his canvas intact, though hole spotted, every sail bellying out full, and the *Malouin* darting like a wild thing down the green seas.

Crash!

Another broadside from the great ship, and O'Brien's heart sank at the shudder and thud; but exultation surged up again as he found all steady above. The stern work behind him was a mass of splinters, and he wiped blood from his eyes—a musket ball or splinter had grazed his brow.

Crash upon crash behind them—but they were away now, almost beyond danger of the furious carronades. St. Rocher came leaping to the poop, his eyes blazing.

"*Diantre*, man! You've done it! Now we have but to outrun her—"

"Outrun her—that ship? Are you mad?" O'Brien glared at him. "We can't do it. If she's not crippled—"

He abandoned the wheel and swung about, staring. Well he knew that the brigantine, which had no great speed, could never outrun that ship with the huge spread of canvas. He had staked everything upon the chances of crippling both enemies aloft, and getting enough of a start to be clear of them ere night fell to cover the escape. But, if the ship were not crippled . . .

And she was not. Once again his heart sank as he saw her come about in stately fashion, men swarming black in her rigging, white canvas leaping out in cloud upon cloud—

"*Ah!*"

A gasp from St. Rocher, echoed by a wild, fierce yell from the whole deck. Where her vast spreading foresail had been, was suddenly a limp wreck of flut-

tering canvas; then, like a child's toy boat, her tophamper doubled forward and was down in wild disarray. St. Rocher clapped O'Brien on the back in mad joy, as he shouted;

"Got her! Weakened her foretop—she's out of it! We're free!"

Aye, free; but at a price. All sound aloft, the *Malouin* had suffered enough below to show what those broadsides would have done to her, had she caught them full on. A dozen men were wounded, eight were dead, from ball and musketry and splinter. The decks were ploughed up, the stern cabins were shattered, there were three heavy shot in her hull.

O'Brien stood on the poop and heard the damage recounted, while Guadeloupe dropped away behind, their crippled enemies hull down. St. Rocher came from investigating the damage aft.

"Making water, my Colonel, but she'll stand momentarily. Everything's a ruin in the stern; the first bit of heavy weather would put us under."

"Ships are plentiful," said O'Brien, and found Dunker at his elbow. "Well?"

"The prisoner, Captain—"

"Oh!" O'Brien started, and uttered a short laugh. "Fetch him here. Hobbs! Reeve a block and line at the foreyard. Phelim! Lay aft with six men for a hanging party."

Now there was silence along the decks, and men stared one at another; and St. Rocher stood by the rail with cynical air, watching.

The Marquis de Fleury was dragged in front of O'Brien, and drew himself up to meet those blue eyes, after one glance around him. He was a frightful object; soiled with dirt and blood, clothes half ripped away, shaven pate and flabby cheeks glittering in the sunlight as sweat rolled down. Only his eyes were cool and firm.

"Is there any reason why I shouldn't hang you?" snapped O'Brien, wiping blood from his eyes.

"You might use a bullet," said Fleury.

O'Brien laughed savagely.

"Not so. A dog like you is lucky to get off with a rope. Phelim! Take him and hang him and leave his body at the yardarm!"

He watched them with eyes of blue ice as they marched the miserable, flabby figure into the waist, and so forward, binding arms behind back, making ready the line and noose. Here was the culmination of brooding years, in this justice meted out to a wretch who had so fearfully harmed him, who had wrecked his life and love . . .

He saw them lay the noose about Fleury's neck, saw the man swing on to the line at Phelim's command, saw it draw taut. Then his own voice astounded him. Something broke within him.

"Stop! There'll be no hanging. Phelim, have him locked in a cabin."

O'Brien turned and went below, in savage humor, and into the great cabin where the sunlight streamed in from a great shattered rent in the side.

After a little St. Rocher came in, a queer look in his thin face, and stood looking at his chief with lustrous dark eyes.

"Ye could not do it, my Colonel?" he asked.

"God forgive me, I could not," said O'Brien moodily. "I've waited years for it, I've dreamed of it—and I could not. As you said once, things look different close up."

"And now you will never do it," said Rocher.

Something in the tone, something in the man's face, made O'Brien's eyes lift, brought his head up with a jerk.

"What d'ye mean?"

St. Rocher leaned against the bulkhead and looked down at him coolly.

"He was nerved up to endure it, that's all, and when the rope was taken from his neck, he gave way. The men say he was struck down by the hand of God. He's dead."

And St. Rocher, who had once looked upon such things with a shrug, actually crossed himself.

So closed the past behind Colonel James O'Brien, as the *Malouin* rushed seaward.

DUTY

A Story of the French Foreign Legion

By J. D. NEWSOM

ME? WHY, I guess I've been in the Foreign Legion almost fifteen years. Yes, it is fifteen years next March. That's a long time. I'm beginning to forget how to talk English. The words don't come as glib as they used to. I have to stop and think.

No, I don't want to go home. Things have changed too much over there. I wouldn't know where to go or what to do when I got there. I'd be worse off than a bohunk immigrant. Relatives? They're gone, heaven alone knows where, and I don't give a damn. I did write a few letters after I cleared out, but nobody ever took the trouble to drop me a line. They were glad to see the last of me. I was pretty wild in those days.

Just between you and me and this bottle of Kebir wine (good stuff, ain't it?) I was even worse than that. I'm not boasting, but I don't mind telling you I was headed straight for the chair. If I went home I'd have that staring me in the face. Even if the Chicago police have forgotten me, what do you think I could do? Me, a sergeant-major of the Legion?

Over yonder on the skyline, that streak of blue—that's the Tafilalet range. I know those hills as you know your own backyard. I've humped a pack from one end of the range to the other. It's lousy with Chleuh tribesmen who can shoot the badge off your cap at five hundred yards. They're tough babies—tougher than their own goats; but their women are fine. The best looking women in Morocco. I remember when we took Ksar-es-Souk you could buy the pick of the bunch for fifty centimes. Bargain prices. And then they tell you a Mohammedan is careful of his women. Some are and some aren't, and that's the long and short of it.

How's that? Fighting? What do you

think we do in the Legion, hemstitching? When there's any fighting to be done in this neck of the woods you won't have to look far to find the Legion coming up hotfoot through the dust. That's our job, fighting. We've mopped up half the world all the way from Fez to Hanoi. But there's nothing we can't do, from bridge building to painting frescoes. No matter what trade you may need you're sure to find a Legionnaire who knows something about it. The queerest bunch of *salopards* you ever came across. Russians, Heinies, dagoes—everything. All sorts, good, bad and indifferent.

You hear a lot of talk about the discipline of the Legion, but where would we be without discipline? You've got to handle these birds with an iron hand. They wouldn't be in the Legion if they were law abiding, God fearing citizens like you; they'd be home with their wives and their brats, toasting their toes by the fire, instead of forming fours in a barrack yard. They're here because they couldn't fit in anywhere else. They don't understand mercy and kindness. Certainly not! They'd think you were weak. Drill hell out of 'em, treat 'em rough, make 'em clean and smart whether they like it or not and sooner or later they'll begin to understand a thing or two.

There's a motto on our flag, "Honor and Fidelity." That tells the whole story in a nutshell. A man's no good to us until he understands what we mean by duty. It's hard to explain because it means so damn much.

Look here—I'll try to make it clear.

When I enlisted I was just plain no-good. I can see that now. I didn't know what I was letting myself in for and I thought every guy with a stripe on his sleeve was out gunning for me. All I wanted to do was drink and run around after the girls. The wine's cheap at Sidi-Bel-Abbes and, as for the girls, you can use your own imagination. It was quite some change from Chicago, believe me.

I had a chip on both shoulders and every time anybody gave me an order I took it as a personal insult. I thought I was being smart! Oh, sure, that's the sort of coot I was, telling the platoon sergeant where he got off and all that sort of thing. But it didn't get me anywhere at all. It was my funeral. Every time I tried to start something I landed in the guardhouse or the cells, and they managed to get along without me. The hours of pack drill I've done. *Bon dieu*, what a fool!

Well, anyway, I struggled along somehow or other for four months, until I was passed out of the awkward squad and transferred to full duty. All I wanted to do was desert first chance I got, but the Legion has been in existence almost a century, and what it doesn't know about handling men isn't worth knowing. They didn't give me time to turn around. I was shot out of the depot at an hour's notice, headed for the Fifth Battalion at El Meskine.

"Maybe you can find a black Jew at El Meskine who'd be willing to buy your kit for twenty-five francs," says the drill sergeant, when he hands me my marching orders. He knew all about me, you see. "I hope you desert, my lad; I really do. You'll be on active service once you're with the Fifth. They'll line you up against a wall, when they catch you, and pepper you with bullets. That's what you need, you wall eyed camel—a dose of lead poisoning. It'll do you a lot of good."

I was feeling mean, for I knew that he had put me down for the draft a month ahead of my time, so like a fool I tried to clout him on the jaw just to get even with him. He was wide awake and hunting for trouble. Almost before I could clench my fist he caught me in the stomach with the butt end of his rifle—and I went to El Meskine with handcuffs on my wrists.

We were a week getting there. It's just north of the Djebel Horad hills. There was no railroad line in those days. We had to march. Thirty kilometers a day, tripping over stones, floundering ankle deep in sand. That's one hike I won't forget. My wrists were so swollen and raw I could barely bend my fingers. See

the scars? The bracelets did that. The sun made 'em so hot the skin stuck to 'em and came away in strips. I had a grand time, all because I didn't have guts enough to keep my mouth shut while I was being bawled out.

To make matters worse I'd packed along a bottle of cheap cognac. As soon as I started drinking I cracked up. You can't drink bad hooch and tote sixty-five pounds of kit around on your back in the desert. It can't be done and that's all there is to it. On the third day out I went down flat on my face and, instead of calling for the *cacolets*, the sergeant tickled my ribs with the toe of his boot.

"It's up to you," he told me. "*Marche ou creve*—march or croak. You can lie here for all of me. I don't mind. The neighborhood is full of Beni-M'Zab who'll be delighted to carve you open and fill your belly full of stones. It's a playful habit of theirs when they find a drunken Legionnaire."

I knew enough to know I didn't want to have anything to do with the Beni-M'Zab. They're bad actors. I'd been shown photographs of troopers who had fallen into their hands. They're the worst swine in creation.

I got up, and I reached El Meskine. How, I don't pretend to know. You get so you can march in your sleep. The oasis looked so green and cool I could have cried when I caught sight of it if the last drop of moisture hadn't been sweated out of my hide. I was in bad shape, weak and sick and mad as hell.

AS SOON as we got in I started making complaints. I wanted justice. My ribs were all bruised where the sergeant had kicked me. What I thought I deserved was a bed in the infirmary, a couple of months' furlough and a front seat on the parade ground the day the sergeant lost his stripes. I was sure they'd court-martial him as soon as I started yapping about his brutal ways. I hadn't done a thing. Oh, no! I was as innocent as a new born babe.

Well, I was hauled up before the Old Man. Colonel Grandet, it was, in those days, a long, skinny son of a gun with a brick-red face and a white mustache which grew out halfway across his cheeks.

He folded his hands across his stomach, sat back in his chair and let me talk. He took it all in, nodding his head now and then, and smiling at me as much as to say, "My poor fellow! What you've had to endure makes my heart bleed. It's monstrous. I'm mighty glad you've come to me with your troubles."

That's what I thought. I had a lot to learn about poker face Grandet.

When I stopped he started.

"I don't expect my men to be angels," he told me, "but I do want men who can swallow their medicine without whimpering. You—you're a cheap and nasty blatherskite. You're not fit to serve with my battalion, not in your present condition. I'm going to send you to the blockhouse at Ras-el-Ghazer. Maybe they can sweat some of the nastiness out of your system. When you show signs of improvement maybe we can turn you loose among decent men."

And that's all the good complaining did me.

I didn't stay at El Meskine long enough to find out where the canteen was. The supply column was leaving for Ras-el-Ghazer the next morning. When it pulled out I was hobbling along with the rear guard, eating dust by the peck and cursing a blue streak. Mad? I was so flaming mad I'd have put two feet of cold steel down the *vaguemestre's* throat if they hadn't taken away my bayonet. I couldn't see I'd brought it all on myself, mind you. I thought I had a grievance. They weren't going to bulldoze me. No, sir!

Ras-el-Ghazer. The name didn't mean anything to me, but I soon found out a whole lot. There's only one way to describe that place, and that's hell on earth. Even now it makes my hair curl to think of it.

It's fifty miles from El Meskine—a small blockhouse built of red stone, squatting down in the middle of the pass between steep red cliffs. Everything was wrong with that damn place. There isn't a tree or a twig or a blade of *alfa* grass. Nothing but stone and sand and those damn hills trembling in the heat. It's hot all right down there in the pass, hotter than anything I've ever known. The wind blows twenty-four hours a day, so that you live and eat and sleep in a cloud of gritty dust.

Dust! Hell, how I came to hate it. Dust in your food and in the bottom of your cup; dust in your teeth, in your clothes, up under your eyelids. It wears the skin off the soles of your feet and chafes your lips till they crack open and bleed.

And the water at Ras-el-Ghazer. One good drink of that stuff, unboiled, is enough to put you under the sod. And the flies! And the vermin! And the eternal, everlasting scrape-scrape-scrape of the sand piling up against the walls . . .

But all that was only the frosting on the cake, as you might say. None of us were sent to Ras-el-Ghazer for our health. We were there because we were the scum of the battalion—the soreheads and the jailbirds who couldn't be made to fit in. I thought I was a tough *hombre*, but alongside of some of those *salopards*, why, I was as simple and good and obedient as a choirboy.

What that gang needed was discipline. It got it good and plenty. Discipline with a capital D, and then some.

A captain called Bellot was in charge of the blockhouse. He looked as though he'd been made for the job; the hardest man, bar none, I've ever met. Six foot two, thickset, bullnecked, with little pig eyes and a mouth like a rat trap. When he hit you you stayed put for the rest of the day. And he used his fists if you so much as batted an eyelash in his presence. He had us lashed to the mast.

To back him up he had a squad of fifteen hand picked noncoms, sergeants and corporals, who seemed to enjoy being at Ras-el-Ghazer. I wouldn't have them in my company today on a bet. When I come across a soldier who won't do his stuff I hand him over to the *Zephyrs* * and let 'em take care of his training. What they do is none of my business. But those *chiourmes* of Bellot's might have been his brothers. They kicked first and gave their orders afterward. We did everything on the double, dress, eat and work. On our toes all the time.

You get the idea? They had us out on the parade ground ten hours a day, drilling to the tap of the drum; a gang of half starved scarecrows. There wasn't a whole uniform in the detachment. When our shoes wore out we went barefoot—and Bellot fined us for "damaging government property."

That's the kind of a lad he was. He went too far. God alone knows how we stood it. We envied those who died, but we didn't bother to put crosses on their graves. It was every man for himself at Ras-el-Ghazer.

But that sort of treatment did us no good. Discipline without justice is a joke. It made liars and hypocrites out of some, but most of us simply went from bad to worse. If Bellot and his noncoms hadn't carried revolvers they would have been torn to pieces.

There were fifty of us cooped up in the blockhouse, but the biggest scoundrel of all was a man by the name of Vaillard. A bad egg, if ever there was one. Bad? He was crapulous. He must have been about fifty; a short, broad shouldered fellow with a gray beard full of lice and a big, red veined nose stuck in the middle of his face like an overripe tomato.

He was what we call a *débrouillard*—a wire puller—clever as a fox. He never missed a chance. We though he was great. The rest of us were on short rations (stale goat's meat and stale bread) but Vaillard lived on the fat of the land. And as for wine, he must have had duplicate keys to the wine locker in the sergeants' mess. In fact, I'm sure he had. We knew where to go when we wanted a

* Penal Battalion.

drink. Vaillard always had a cache somewhere about in the blockhouse. That's one reason why he was so popular.

For another thing, he had the gift of the gab. He'd been a professor of political science at Rennes University. When he was drunk he could spout international politics by the hour. Interesting stuff, too. He'd sit there cross legged on his cot, all green and bloated in the moonlight, picking cooties out of his beard while he told us about all the dirty deals the different governments were putting across.

When he was very drunk and maudlin he used to boast about how he had cleared out of Rennes, leaving his family in the lurch—a wife and three kids. He used to gloat over it and call 'em every dirty name he could think of. I don't know why he quit teaching. That's one thing he never mentioned, but it must have been some damn dirty business, judging by the man he was.

But that don't explain the hold he had on the Legionnaires. He used to preach mutiny almost within earshot of the sergeants, but other men did that too. At first I couldn't dope out why he had so much power. I found out more about him after I'd been at Ras-el-Ghazer about a month. Our room corporal was found in a gully not far from the blockhouse with a knife stuck in his back.

"Some Chleuh marauder did that," says Bellot after one look at the knife. "That ought to teach you imbeciles not to wander about in the pass as though you were promenading up the Champs Élysées."

And he let the matter drop. Even then I had a hunch he was lying. He didn't seem to be as cocksure as usual, and he kept looking at us out of the corner of his eye as if he were trying to catch us off our guard.

THAT night there was a good deal of whispering in the hut, and the man in the next cot to mine said in my ear:

"Vaillard got him. That's his fourth. One of these days he'll get Bellot, and Bellot knows it."

Vaillard wasn't saying anything. He was picking cooties out of his beard and smiling like a heathen idol.

"How about it?" I asked him a couple of days later. "Did you bump him off?"

We were out on the road at the time, leveling the sides of a *oued*. The platoon sergeant was standing on the bank above us with a rifle tucked under his arm.

Vaillard looked up at him, then he looked at me. The whites of his eyes had turned yellow.

"This pick," says he, holding the weapon under my nose, "this pick has got a loose head. I should detest intensely, my dear Porter, to see it fly off and come in violent contact with your skull. The result would be simply disastrous. Get back to work, you baboon, and don't bother me with your foolish questions."

That held me for quite some time. I didn't want to wake up some morning with a bayonet in my heart.

After that, though, we rubbed along pretty well. He used to kid me about being an American—said I didn't show the proper pioneer spirit. When we were out breaking stones on the road, and the thermometer stood at a hundred and ten, he'd start telling me about the American Revolution and why the French came in on our side. He was a nut all right.

But I wasn't thinking about the War of Independence. I was too busy sweating blood. Ever since the murder the noncoms had been riding us for all they were worth. They were just beginning to be a bit rattled—all the more so because Bellot, who drank like a fish, was slowly going to pieces. It wasn't nice to watch; a big fellow like that getting all fat and puffy and soft. One minute he would be all over us, slobbering because we were having such a tough time; the next he'd fly into a crazy temper and hand the whole gang a week's punishment drill. We didn't know whether we were coming or going.

We were all set for a blow up. You could feel the strain growing worse and worse, day by day, week by week. One man did go crazy. We didn't have side-arms, so this fellow sharpened the edge of his tin spoon and hacked his throat open. It was a messy job, you can take it from me. He was two hours dying. His death rattle woke me up, but we didn't interfere. There was nothing we could do. Vaillard, standing stark naked by the bed, paddling in the poor devil's blood, gave him absolution . . .

My teeth were chattering. I think that was when I began to turn over a new leaf although I didn't realize it at the time. I went out in the yard—there was a new moon hanging above the pass—and was as sick as a dog.

It was some time after that that Bellot sent a confidential message to headquarters asking the colonel to send along another officer to assist him. He said he was sick and needed a rest, and he also told the colonel that the detachment was showing signs of unrest due to the pernicious influence of certain "dangerous elements" which he intended to deal with summarily as soon as help arrived. You could tell after reading the first couple of lines that he was in a panic. We saw the letter because the clerk steamed open the envelop and made a copy to pass around.

"That settles it," says Vaillard. "I suppose I am one of the dangerous elements referred to by our dypsomaniac. I'm a gentleman and a scholar and no swashbuckling mercenary can humiliate me. Delcasse once said to me, 'We are the only two men in France who understand the complexities of the Rousseau-Spolinski convention.' He was wrong; I am the only man who understands it. I could blow Europe wide open tomorrow morning if I told all I knew about Clause V of the secret document—and I'm at the mercy of a hog like Bellot who can't even write decent French. He's only said one true thing; he needs a rest. By and by I'll see he gets it."

Bellot's panic had spread to the noncoms. They were as jumpy as hell. Some of them tried to softsoap us; others lived with one hand on the butt end of their guns. They were afraid to issue us with picks and shovels for fear we might use 'em as weapons. We spent our time drilling in the yard, with the white-hot sun boring into our skulls and the sand scouring our eyelids. One of the noncoms drilled us while the others mounted guard, ready to shoot.

Then one night just as I was dropping off to sleep Vaillard came and squatted on the end of my cot.

"My boy," says he in a whisper, "just between you and me, would you like to see a good deed done? I am on my way to cure Captain Bellot of cirrhosis of the liver directly attributable to his intemperance. You have fairly steady nerves; perhaps you would like to witness the operation. It will be quite painless."

"Nothing doing," I told him. "I do all my killing in broad daylight. And anyway, if you skewer Bellot they'll bring up a machine gun section and blast us into the middle of next week. I want to get away from Ras-el-Ghazer with a whole skin."

"You're a yellow bellied coward," says he, laughing all to himself. "A filthy, crawling, good for nothing coward. I'll have to do the job alone, though I am a scholar bowed down with years and learning. You'll follow me like a lamb when I say the word. It's only three hundred kilometers to the Rio del Oro border, and I'm the man to lead you there, like Moses pointing the way to the Promised Land."

Rio del Oro is Spanish territory. We couldn't have reached it, not in a million years, but no scheme was too crazy for us to talk about in those days. Talk's cheap, and it helped us to forget what we were up against at Ras-el-Ghazer.

Still I didn't like to be an accessory to the crime, as they say at court-martials. Creeping up on a drunken man and murdering him didn't appeal to me at all. And after all there was something to be

said for Bellot. He wasn't much good, but we were a darn sight worse. I said something of the sort to Vaillard. First thing I knew he was pricking the skin over my ribs with the point of a knife.

"Upon my soul," says he, blowing his breath in my face—and his breath smelled like a sewer for his teeth were nothing but green snags—"I mistook you for a forthright rogue, a Bayard of the gutter, *sans peur et sans reproche*. But I see that I am dealing with a typical Yankee, a sniveling, cant mongering Puritan. You have a conscience! Probably you think you have a soul. I am so disappointed that I am tempted to put you without further delay in a position to discover the non-existence of your Yahveh."

"You're wrong," says I. "I never been to New England. I was born in Chicago."

At that he laughed some more.

"Then there's some hope for you yet," says he. "I'm told Chicago is almost as corrupt as some of our European centers of learning. But if you move while I'm away, Porter, I shall be compelled to kill you."

With that he tiptoed out of the hut. I stayed put. It wasn't my business to protect the captain; he had a whole arsenal in his room. So I sat up in bed and lit a cigaret. I wasn't alone either. Several other men were awake too. If I'd made a move they'd have piled right on top of me.

Vaillard had been gone about ten minutes when we heard a commotion in the courtyard. It was pitch dark. All I could see through the window was a group of three, four men standing by the gate. One of 'em was carrying a storm lantern. They were too far away for me to catch what they were saying. After a bit they moved away from the gate and headed toward Bellot's hut.

"They've caught Vaillard and shoved him in the guardhouse," somebody said. "They were bound to get him sooner or later."

That's what I was thinking too, but the next moment who should come catfooting into the hut but Vaillard, sweating with excitement.

"I fixed him," he told us. "I had to work fast. The hyena bit me while I had one hand over his mouth. He was squealing like a rat. I couldn't find his damn heart; he's got ribs like barrel staves, and I'm dripping blood."

I WAS all through with Vaillard from then on. That man was a ghoul. The glow of my match lighted up his bare, flabby body. He wasn't telling any lies. His arms were red to the elbow and he was streaked with blood from his hair to his feet. A mess.

I started to say something, but he shut me up.

"You poor fools," he snarled at us, "haven't you any brains at all? Hell's going to bust loose in about two seconds. Didn't you see 'em out in the yard? That's the new officer they've sent up from headquarters to help Bellot tame us. I nearly bumped into him. Now listen; I've started something. It's up to you to finish it. You take no more orders from anybody except me. See these?" He held up a couple of revolvers he'd picked up in the captain's room. "First man shows any signs of wobbling gets a bullet in his nut. We've got to get the keys to the storehouse. We can't do anything without guns and ammunition. There's no hurry and don't get rattled."

Whichever way you look at it, it was a bad business. I didn't like taking orders from Vaillard worth a cent. And there were a good many other guys just like me —willing to crab all day long but leery about taking chances when we got right down to brass tacks. We'd been kicked about so much that we were sort of used to it, and at the back of our minds most of us were hoping to get away from Ras-el-Ghazer some day. Just then, though, our prospects weren't so hot.

Well, there was a good deal of shouting going on over in the officers' quarters where they'd found Bellot's body, and

before long we saw the lantern bobbing across the yard—coming our way.

Two sergeants and a corporal came prancing into the hut.

"Stand by your cots!" yelled Sergeant Kolinski. "Stand by for roll call and kit inspection. I'm ready to shoot to kill. The captain's been murdered and the *salopard* who hacked him to pieces is going to get what is coming to him."

I knew what he was after. There was no washing water at Ras-el-Ghazer (we did all our washing at the well on our way back from roadwork) and Kolinski was pretty sure whoever had killed Bellot wouldn't have had time to scour himself clean with sand. He had a darn good idea, too, who the culprit was, for instead of waiting for us to line up he made a beeline down the room for Vaillard's cot. That's where he went wrong. The corporal was holding the lantern above Kolinski's shoulder, and the light blinded 'em both. They were right on top of Vaillard before they saw he had a gun in his hand. At that range he couldn't miss. He shot Kolinski through the heart. The sergeant flopped over backward, knocking the lantern out of the corporal's hand.

Moullet, the other sergeant, who was standing just inside the doorway, covering us with a rifle, fired a couple of shots at random. We had him down, and the corporal too, before they could do any harm. We trussed 'em up with strips torn from our blankets and shoved them in a corner.

"Don't kill 'em," said Vaillard. "They may come in handy as hostages. We've made a good beginning—two revolvers and three rifles. We're not as helpless as we were. If I know anything about the mental processes of our little playmates they'll leave us in peace until daybreak. We're under cover and they know it. You can curl up and sleep. We'll post a couple of sentries just for luck."

Things panned out pretty much as he had expected.

Somebody opened fire on us with a light machine gun, but the bullets flew wide or smacked into the stone walls.

As soon as it stopped Vaillard yelled:

"At the next burst of fire I'll prop Sergeant Moullet and Corporal Argotti up in the window and use 'em for sandbags."

"How about Sergeant Kolinski?" a voice shouts back.

"Kolinski's deader than cold mutton," Vaillard sings out. "One more shot from that *mitrailleuse* and Moullet is going the same road."

That did the trick. After that they left us alone. It was a long night, believe me. We didn't sleep much. We were too busy wondering what was going to happen in the morning.

I was expecting them to let drive with everything they had as soon as it was light enough for them to see across the courtyard. With a couple of those light machine guns they could have kept us bottled up in the hut until we were damn well ready to surrender. We had no water to speak of in our bottles, and in that heat we couldn't have held out more than twelve hours.

"Leave it to me," Vaillard kept saying. "When the zero hour strikes I'll tell you how to act. We have five guns and two prisoners; that's more than we need to put the fear of God into their black hearts."

I couldn't see it, but I didn't butt in. There's no sense in arguing with a maniac with a gun in his hand.

We had plenty of time to cool off. It was broad daylight before anything happened. Vaillard was yelling himself hoarse, threatening to shoot his prisoners if they didn't come over and parley with him. After awhile the door of the orderly room opened and out came the new officer—a young chap in a white uniform with his *képi* cocked over one eye. He looked right smart.

He stood on the threshold for a minute or so, listening to the things Vaillard had to say; then, as though he had all day ahead of him, he took out a cigaret, tapped it on his thumb nail and lit it.

"That's all right," he called out.

"Don't throw a fit. I'm coming right over."

Before crossing the yard he took off his belt, revolver holster and all, and dropped it in the dust.

"If you want to shoot an unarmed man," says he, "now's your chance. Judging by the sound of your voices, though, you're too hysterical to shoot straight enough to hit a haystack at ten yards."

And he ambled across the yard as slow as you please, keeping his hands well away from his pockets just to show us he didn't have a gun hidden in his pockets.

"Let him come," says Vaillard. "If we can lay hands on this young pup we can dictate our own terms. We're as good as in Rio del Oro this minute."

In came the lieutenant—a second lieutenant at that—a kid of about twenty-three; freckles on his nose and a small mustache. Nothing exceptional about him. You'll find much the same sort of junior subaltern in every garrison in North Africa.

"I think," says he, brisk and matter of fact, "I think it's high time we talked things over. I am now in command of this detachment. It happens to be my first independent command, and I do not particularly relish the idea of beginning my career with a mutiny. It's not done. May I remind you of the fact that you are Legionnaires, and that your first duty is obedience. Your privilege is to be proud of your regiment and to do nothing that will injure its good name."

Positively, that's what he said. It brought down the house. Telling us, a gang of ragged, lousy, barefoot mutineers, that we had something to be proud of! We laughed till we choked.

The kid stood there, very quiet and steady, puffing away at his cigaret—but his lower lip was twitching, and I could see a vein throbbing fast as hell on his forehead.

By and by we stopped laughing. It wasn't as funny as all that. If the looie had been a few years older I don't think he would have stood a chance of getting out of the hut with a whole skin. But, damn it, he was so confoundedly young and so much in earnest it took the wind out of our sails. We hadn't seen a clean shaven face or a clean uniform in six months.

"Hey," one man sang out, "is nursey here too? Run home to nursey, *mon petit rat en sucre*, before the bogey man gets you."

There was a lot more of the same thing. The looie waited until we ran short of ideas. He threw away his cigaret and folded his hands behind his back.

"IF YOU are quite through," says he, "perhaps you will condescend to listen to me for a moment or so. I shall be brief.

"In the first place, I have been sent here, not to second Captain Bellot, but to replace him.

"Secondly, battalion headquarters has decided, after a careful investigation, that this detachment has been stationed too long at Ras-el-Ghazer. I am to take you back to El Meskine.

"Thirdly, a replacement draft is on its way here at the present moment to relieve you. It will arrive the day after tomorrow at the very latest.

"I hope," says he, "I make myself clearly understood. It is obvious to the meanest intelligence that you need a change of diet, a change of scenery, not to mention new uniforms and new boots."

There wasn't a sound in the hut. Quiet —I could hear the blood creeping in my ears.

I could see those three hundred kilometers of desert to the Rio del Oro border stretching out and out and out. And even supposing we got there, which wasn't likely, what was to become of us? We were in the Legion because we were not wanted anywhere else. We had no money, no friends, nothing. On the other hand, here was this kid telling us that he was to take the detachment out of the damn pass, all the way back to El Meskine.

The young looie let his words sink in.

"I don't have to tell you," he went on after awhile, "that your present attitude is not going to get you anywhere. If you were to abandon your post and desert you would not get far. The replacement draft would be on your trail in short order. Moreover, this hut can be enfiladed from the windows of the orderly room, which would make your present position singularly awkward if anything untoward happened. You know that as well as I do."

We did. He didn't have to rub it in.

"And now," says he, "we come to the crux of the matter. You have behaved most disgracefully, but as this is my first command and, also, because I realize from what I have heard that mistakes have been made on both sides, I should like to wash the slate clean and make a new beginning."

He had us on our toes. Vaillard, standing back of the gang, was clawing at his beard and muttering to himself, shaking his head from side to side as if he were trying to remember something and couldn't. We weren't bothering about him much just then.

"How do we know this isn't a trap?" somebody shouted.

"Because I say so," the lieutenant flashed back. "You know damn well I am not lying. But—" he held up one hand—"I am not through yet. Wait. Before we go one step further the murderer or murderers of Captain Bellot and Sergeant Kolinski *must* be placed under arrest."

Not one of us looked at Vaillard. I'll say that much for us. But you could feel the strain growing worse every second. My knees were knocking together.

"That's not making a clean start," one man pointed out.

The lieutenant shook his head.

"I will have nothing to do with murderers," he snapped. "I give you five minutes to decide what you want to do. My conditions are final; you must accept them or suffer the consequences."

Just them Vaillard came to life.

"Gangway," says he, shoving us aside. "Let me talk to this little squirt." He had a revolver in either hand. "Come here," he ordered. "Come close, I have a few things I'd like to say myself."

The lieutenant didn't budge.

"I am not taking orders from you," he answered. "Whatever you have to say, say it quick!"

So Vaillard had to go to him. There was a queer, angry look on Vaillard's face. His eyes were wide open and as round as saucers.

"First off," says he, "what's your name?"

"That's right," agreed the lieutenant. "I forgot to introduce myself. I am Lieutenant Jean Vaillard."

At that Vaillard threw back his head and roared with laughter. He was crazy mad.

"I knew it!" he yelled. "Look at him! God in heaven, it's my own son they've sent out to command the detachment!"

The lieutenant was as white as a sheet. His lips were moving, but he couldn't make a sound. He seemed to shrivel up, so that he looked about a hundred years old.

"So that pious, mealy mouthed mother of yours managed to give you an education, did she?" roared Vaillard. "You look like her! The same sweet, kind face, and the same steadfast eyes that drove me to drink. And you've come out here, you nasty little hunk of vermin, to give me orders!"

The lieutenant couldn't take his eyes off Vaillard.

"My father," says he and his voice was all shaky. "My father—Adrien Vaillard of Rennes University—I thought . . ."

"To hell with what you thought," snarled Vaillard. "That's me: Adrien Vaillard, professor of political science, pillar of the church, living in three rooms with a saint and a cherub. Smothered in your damn, syrupy respectability until I was so sick of it I could have killed her and you—the manly little fellow, the pride of his mother's heart!"

He caught the lieutenant by the arm and swung him around.

"This," he shouted at us, "this, gentlemen of the gutter, is my one and only son. I'll bet you any money he was brought up to worship my memory and to look upon me as the unfortunate victim of unmoral companions. Knowing the brat's mother as I do, I'm sure no evil word ever passed her lips. And this namby-pamby, mushy infant wants to tell us what to do and how to behave. We're too tough for you. You can't make a dent in our hides. We're through! We're going to dishonor our regiment and break your poor little heart. You can go back to that female you call your mother and tell her what kind of a man I am now."

At that the lieutenant flared up.

"You'll leave her name out of this," says he. "We'll settle this as man to man."

But you could tell that the kid didn't know what to say or what to do. All the starch had gone out of him.

Vaillard clouted him over the head.

"Don't talk to me in that unfilial manner," says he. "I won't have it. And don't make those cow eyes at me. I'm not a ghost even though I am the skeleton in the Vaillard family closet. A mighty hefty skeleton too, and don't you forget it. I'll wring your neck if you try to humiliate your gray haired old papa."

"There is no doubt about that," he said slowly. "You are my father. It is not for me to judge. You have lived your life as you have seen fit. But I warn you my duty is to my regiment. I intend to let nothing whatsoever interfere with the performance of what I consider to be my duty."

Vaillard laughed at him.

"I don't give a curse about you or your duty or your regiment. You'll do as you're told or you'll go the way Bellot went. If it comes to a fight we'll butcher every man with a stripe on his arm. You can't stop us. We're through with your *saleté* of a regiment. Through. We want the keys to the storeroom and we want 'em in a hurry. Go get 'em and bring 'em back to me. And you'll have that machine gun dumped in the courtyard where nobody can get at it. If you don't do as I say, these two men—" he pointed to the prisoners—"are I going to die. Their blood'll be on your head. Take it or leave it. Now go!"

But the lieutenant didn't budge an inch.

"What you want is out of the question," he answered, looking his old man straight in the eye. "Altogether impossible. I can not help you." He turned to us. "This detachment will fall in outside in five minutes, as I said once before. At the same time Captain Bellot's murderer must be handed over. When these conditions have been complied with we can carry on."

Vaillard caught him by the throat and shook him like a terrier worrying a rat.

"You idiot!" he shouted in his face. "You poor, sniveling imbecile—I killed Bellot and I killed Kolonski! I'm the assassin you are so anxious to find. Here I am. Now what are you going to do about it? I'm the boss of this outfit. What I say goes. Not a man will lift a finger against me."

The lieutenant couldn't take it in.

"I don't believe it," he gulped. "You're lying, trying to shield the real culprit. You couldn't, you wouldn't do such a thing."

"Couldn't I?" bellowed Vaillard, shoving his hands under the lieutenant's nose. "Look at 'em! Look at my arms! See those brown streaks! That's Bellot's blood, by God! I ripped out his life, swine that he was. Get out of here, you little fool, and muzzle those hounds of yours. We want the keys to the storehouse and no interference." He put his paws on the kid's shoulders. "You understand, Jeannot, my boy, it's your own father who's telling you to do this. Your own father. Now go—go quickly!"

The lieutenant backed away from Vaillard's bloody hands. He gave him one last look, then, stiff as a ramrod, he turned to the right about and marched

out of the hut. I saw him stoop and pick up his belt before he went into the orderly room. He didn't once look back.

"THAT got under his skin," chuckled Vaillard. "I thought he was going to burst into tears. That was a master stroke, gentlemen of the gutter, a stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. He may talk big about his duty, but when it comes to shooting his own pop he'll curl up like that well known botanical freak, the *Minosa pudica*, which you know nothing about. We're safe! We're off! We're on our way to dear old Rio del Oro. In about one minute my little Jean will be running back with the keys on a red plush cushion."

We waited one minute, and we waited another, and still there was no sign of the lieutenant.

"We must hang together, brother scoundrels," Vaillard kept saying over and over again. "If you give way now you'll be breaking stones with the penal battalion from now until the crack of doom. Don't trust that kid. All that stuff about going back to El Meskine is just so much hot air. Stand by me now and I'll see you through safely. Are you with me or against me?"

Most of us were sitting on the fence, too dumb to think, just waiting for something to happen.

A couple of years seemed to go by. Then the orderly room door swung open again and the lieutenant came out, chin up, shoulders well back, stepping out as smart as a whip as he'd been taught to do at the officers' training school.

He stopped in the middle of the parade ground; if the machine gun had opened up on us as we came out of the hut it would have caught him in the back first.

"De—tachment!" he sings out. "*Rassemblement!* Fall in!"

He knew how to give an order. No weakness, no hesitation. It came as crisp and clear as a bugle call.

"Fall in! Markers this way!"

He was bluffing and we knew it, but somehow it got us. It was nine-tenths force of habit, I guess, and one-tenth admiration for the kid's nerve. Out there in the sunshine, telling us to fall in! It was worth trying just for the fun of the thing—to see how it would work.

Not a word was said but, first thing you know, a dozen of us were edging over toward the door.

"You can't do that!" yells Vaillard. "You cringing dogs, are you going to let a sniveling *enfant de troupe* tell you what to do? Stand fast! I'll break him in two across my knee. I'm his father, whether he likes it or not and, by God, he's going to listen to me!"

By that time we were out in the yard, dragging our feet in the dust, not quite sure even then what we meant to do.

Vaillard ran out and stood in front of us.

"Stand fast!" he shouted. "Let me deal with this squirt. I'll teach him not to butt in when he's not wanted. Jean," he went on, turning to the lieutenant, "I'm warning you; don't interfere. You can't stop us. Nothing can stop us!"

The lieutenant's voice was as hard as steel.

"Soldier Vaillard, you are under arrest, charged with the murder of Captain Bellot. You will be tried according to law by a duly constituted court-martial. I order you to put down your arms and surrender."

"Telling me to surrender!" roared Vaillard, bearing down upon the lieutenant. "Do you think I give a curse for your duly constituted court-martials? Do you think I give a curse for you? I don't. You're not going to send me to the stake —not if I can help it!"

"For the second time," said the lieutenant, "Soldier Vaillard, I order you to surrender."

"Be damned to you," said Vaillard. "You're not fit to live, you lousy cur. No man is fit to live who'll hand his own father over to a firing squad."

"I am an officer of the Legion," says the kid. "I have taken an oath and I shall abide by that oath. For the love of God, stand still!"

Vaillard lumbered forward.

"Your oath!" says he. "You blithering jackass, you talk like the school teacher I used to be."

He was ten yards or so from the lieutenant. I saw him raise his gun. The lieutenant stood like a rock.

It was too much for me. I started to run, but the others held me back.

"This is their show," one of 'em told me. "Man to man, let 'em fight it out."

"Will you give me those keys?" says Vaillard. "Yes or no?"

"No," says the lieutenant.

Vaillard let drive. The lieutenant didn't bat an eyelash. A red spot appeared on the left sleeve of his tunic, level with his heart.

"Soldier Vaillard," he called out, "for the third and last time, I summon you to obey the order of your superior officer—surrender!"

Vaillard had stopped dead in his tracks and was squinting down the sights of his gun, cocking his head a little to one side.

"I gave you fair warning," says he, "but you're too conceited to listen to reason. For the fiftieth and the last time, will you give me those keys or will you not?"

The kid's voice broke as he cried:

"Father, I can't! Father, I've got to to my duty!"

Vaillard fired again. He was a bum marksman; that's because the rank and file aren't taught to use revolvers. The bullet tore the *képi* off the lieutenant's head.

Vaillard let out a howl and ran forward, firing as he ran.

The lieutenant ripped open the holster on his hip and yanked out his gun. Very deliberately he raised the gun. I was looking straight at him and if ever I have seen a man in torment the lieutenant was suffering then.

He fired when Vaillard was within six feet of him. One shot. Vaillard pitched over on to his face. His feet drummed against the earth for a second or so, then he lay still.

And that was that.

For a long time the lieutenant stood with his head bowed, brooding over the body, his face all puckered up as though he were going to cry. Maybe he was crying; I don't know.

After awhile he let the gun slip out of his hand and looked up at us, at the detachment. We'd learned our lesson; we were standing on two ranks—heels together, hands down, chests out—scarecrows on parade.

He couldn't quite dope it out. I suppose he was expecting us to lynch him. Bit by bit the truth dawned on him; the mutiny was all over. We were surrendering unconditionally.

Do you think he thanked us, or made a song and dance as some might have done? No, sir. He did not! He didn't ever mention his old man stretched out dead at his feet. He kept his thoughts to himself as an officer should do.

His left arm was dripping blood, but he didn't bother about that either.

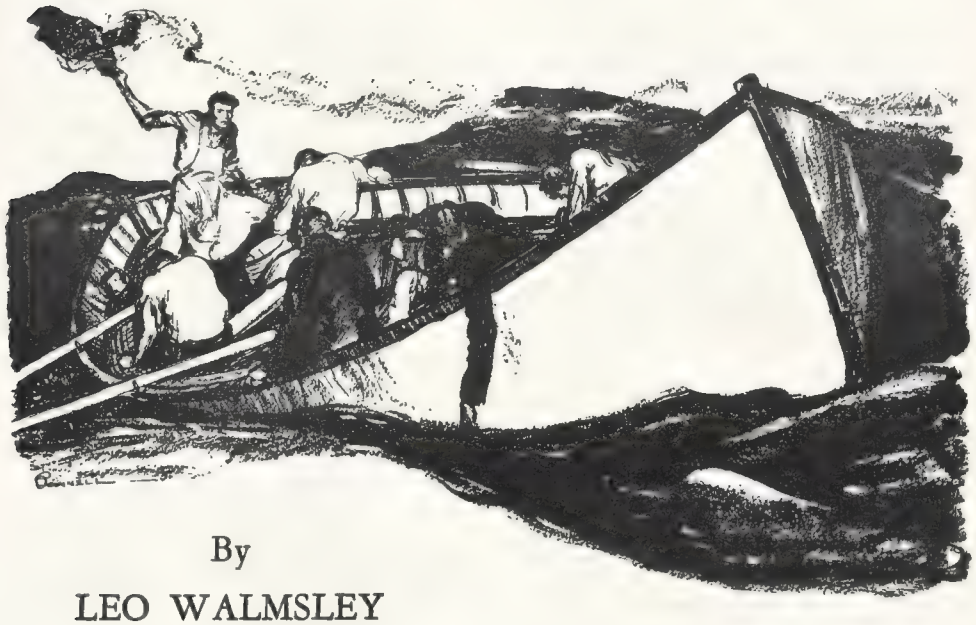
He cleared his throat.

"You form up," says he, "like a pack of wall eyed recruits, which you are not. Up there, in the center! Eyes right—Dress! Steady! That's better, but it's still rotten. De—tachment, 'Tention. From the right—number!"

And that's what I mean when I tell you, in the Legion, it's your duty first, and your duty last, and your duty all the time. Nothing else counts. If the lieutenant hadn't acted as he did, today I'd be a bum knocking about somewhere in Rio del Oro instead of being what I am, a company sergeant-major.

Lieutenant Vaillard? Sure, he's still going strong. He's a captain now. Fact is, he's my company commander right this minute. He's all right; we get along fine. He knows his stuff. A tight mouthed, stiff necked son of a gun. Not once in fourteen years has he ever mentioned Ras-el-Ghazer. You wouldn't think he knew the meaning of the word sentiment, but it's a funny thing—do you know what he does? Every year, if it can be managed, he goes back to the blockhouse and puts a wreath on old Vaillard's damned grave. It's got me buffaloed.

The HERO *of* BRAMBLEWICK



By

LEO WALMSLEY

The Story of an Astounding Liar

BRAMBLEWICK is an old fashioned fishing village on the wildest part of the northeast coast of Yorkshire. The village itself, a compact community of little red roofed cottages intersected by tortuous cobbled lanes, lies snugly in a deep ravine at the north corner of a superb bay. The adjacent coastline is rugged and precipitous, rising to the south of the bay in the grim headland of High Batts—a holy terror to coastal mariners—whence a wild tract of moor sweeps inland in a series of desolate hills, that fall again to the sea at the lesser eminence of Low Batts, which gives its name to a famous lighthouse.

The inhabitants of Bramblewick are descended from an almost pure Scandinavian stock. The men are tall, fair haired, blue eyed. They are slow of speech, unimaginative; dour, almost sullen in their manner. Only a few of them are engaged in fishing; practically all, however, are connected with the sea, chiefly in the mercantile marine; and it is for its seamen that Bramblewick has been reputed for the last three centuries throughout the length and breadth of the shipping world.

You will meet Bramblewick seamen in New York, in Frisco, Shanghai; in the Congo ports, in Bangkok, Zanzibar, Rio, Sydney, the Plate, anywhere in fact where a tramp steamer can float, and a cargo—legal or illegal—may be loaded or discharged. They are officers mostly. You will not find them affable; the very devil to do business with. But for seamanship, for courage and fortitude in the face of any odds the devils of the sea may muster, unbeatable.

Slow of speech. That point is important. Unimaginative; yes, even dull. I sailed with a Bramblewick skipper to the Plate and back, a three months' voyage; and in that time I don't think he uttered twenty consecutive words of spontaneous speech. And this was a man who had served a year in a South American prison for gun running and escaped by strangling his guard with a bootlace; who had survived the famous Galveston tidal wave; who had been torpedoed four times and spent a week on a raft in the White Sea; who had experienced a sufficiency of other adventures to keep an ordinary man talking for the rest of his life! The only topic he discussed with anything mildly resembling fervor was the breeding of bantam poultry.

And that is the one thing about Joseph Clegg which remains incomprehensible. He came of Bramblewick stock; was, in fact, first cousin to this dour, close lipped adventurer of the seven seas. Joseph Clegg, the talker, the liar, the undeniable coward, the world acclaimed hero of the *S. S. Carrie Dale!*

At the age of twelve Joseph Clegg was known as the biggest liar in Bramblewick. He was not a prepossessing lad. He had a white face, and thick dark eyebrows which met in the middle. He was rather tall and gawky. He used to carry out the bread for his father who, owing to an accident on board ship, had been obliged to give up the sea and had become a baker. Joe looked consumptive. That of course was not surprising, inasmuch as he had to help his father with the oven even through the hot summer holidays when the rest of the village boys would be playing among the boats, or out on Low Batts reef in the fresh air and sunshine.

Joe was an astounding liar. When he was by himself, and unembarrassed by the presence of witnesses, the most amazing experiences befell him. There was a ruined cottage at the back of the village that was reputed to be haunted. No boy dared venture near the place after dark. Joe came running down to the beach one evening to where the other boys were playing, with a terrifying story of how he had gone into the cellar of the haunted house, and had been chased out again by a human skeleton, waving a blood wet sword in its hand.

On another occasion he thrilled an audience of very juvenile listeners with an account of how he had climbed to a cormorant's nesting ledge on High Batts cliff; how the birds had attacked him until he had put back the eggs he had taken —a very adroit explanation of the lack of material evidence of his exploit.

Joe had stolen apples from the vicar's garden; he had seen eagles carrying lambs in their claws; he had seen whales, and giant rats attacking dogs; he had found an old chest full of bones (which he never offered to exhibit); he knew of sparrow's nests with cuckoo's eggs in them. There was no end to the yarns he would spin.

A liar? The boy had imagination, he had romance, he had the natural instinct of the story teller. Nothing ever happened to him really. Like most children gifted or cursed with an excessive imagination, he was a coward. He dared not walk as far as High Batts by himself, let alone have climbed it. Yet he was not a cowardly or a boastful liar. He invented and yarned for the sheer aesthetic joy of it.

So much for Joseph as a boy. Apart from this trick he had of yarning, always to a chosen audience, he was an awful duffer, and what with several severe illnesses, and being kept away to help his father, his education was of the scantiest kind, and he left school to all intents and purposes illiterate.

He went to sea, of course. In those days the retired skippers of Bramblewick must have owned something like a dozen steamers between them, and it was the natural thing for any boy leaving school to become apprenticed or go before the mast, or take some menial ship's job according to his suitability. Joe signed on as galley boy. While he was on his first voyage his father died. The bakery business was sold. The proceeds

went in trust to old Clegg's widowed sister, Mrs. Wharfe, who lived with her daughter Emily in a cottage down by Bramblewick beach.

JOSEPH'S career at sea from that time until the war was singularly uneventful. He rose from galley boy to cook. He was at sea on an average of eleven months in each year, and when he came home he lived with Mrs. Wharfe and Emily. Among such other Bramblewick sailors who chanced to be home at the same time he was as uncommunicative as they were themselves. His reputation as Bramblewick's biggest liar was forgotten.

It was not until the last summer of the war that Joe landed home looking unusually ill, and walking with a severe limp. War crocks were so common a sight then that his limp did not excite much curiosity. Mrs. Wharfe of course knew that he had poisoned his foot "out foreign". So did Emily, for she had to assist in dressing the wound. The most important thing is that it prevented his going back to sea for some months at least, and that indirectly it led to his buying a small pleasure boat, which he used for what the fishermen call "taking visitors off".

Bramblewick is at its best in summer. The heather is in bloom on High Batts and on the hills beyond. The fields which sweep down to the sea's edge are tinged with the gold of ripening corn. The red roofs of the village make a lovely contrast with the deep blue of the grandly curving Bay. The place attracts a fair number of holiday visitors, chiefly of the better class. There is no promenade at Bramblewick; no band, no cinema, not even a golf course.

It was one of these visitors, a London lady, who "discovered" Joseph. He had grown into the gawky, unprepossessing man one might have expected him to. He was clean shaven, his cheeks were white and smooth; there were permanent dark patches under his eyes. His hair was dry and lusterless; his fingers were stained with incessant cigaret smoking. Insignificant, perhaps, is the word that describes him best. The last thing any one would guess was that he had a romantic soul.

It was a lovely day. The lady fancied a row on the Bay. Joseph took her, the rate of hire being a shilling for the first hour, sixpence for every additional one. Little did that lady guess what she was going to get for her money! He had rowed her halfway to High Batts when an inquiry about his limp caused him to lean forward on his oars and begin.

And while he talked, the lady observed an extraordinary change come over him. His pale eyes gleamed, he became intensely excited. He smoked cigaret after cigaret, throwing the stumps with a dramatic gesture into the sea before they were half smoked.

The yarn he told! His ship had first of all been struck by a mine off the west coast of Ireland. Then a submarine had appeared and fired a torpedo into her. It was midwinter. A terrific sea was running. While he and his mates were struggling among the floating wreckage, the submarine had deliberately shelled them. He himself received a bullet in his leg; but he managed to drag himself on to a raft, on which, in the most frightful weather, without food or drinking water, he was afloat three days. He was one of only four survivors to be picked up by a British destroyer, which, on her way to port, engaged and sank a German submarine.

Joseph had never been mined or torpedoed. One hundred and fifteen out of Bramblewick's two hundred and eleven able bodied men had been killed or drowned or died of wounds up to that summer. Nine Bramblewick sailors had gone in a single night. Joseph had not even heard a shot fired at close range. But what did it matter? It was the actual telling of the story which impressed his hearer; his working up of atmosphere, the sense of dramatic suspense he conveyed, that neatly invented and plausible climax.

It must not be imagined that he was working on the pity of an unsophisticated, sentimental old lady. That lady was resting from two years continuous service in a base hospital. Besides, he was quite hurt when she offered him something extra on his charge for the boat. It must not be thought that Joseph was simply a romantic boaster, that his yarns were mere stories designed to show himself in a heroic light. They were singularly impersonal.

If he was the central figure it was because he employed an artistic license that gave him greater scope, that made his atmosphere more real, more vivid. That vividness was the essential quality of them. They came from a mind, from an imagination that was unspoiled by learning. His art was the art of primitive man, unfettered by rules, by academic convention. If his speech was simple, it was because he had learned no fine phrases from books. If his symbolism was crude it was because he drew from the direct experience of life.

A storm cloud to him, "heaved up like a great lump of yeasted dough". The eyes of a drowned man were like those of a "dead cod rottin' on the beach". A tropical coast at twilight "same color as High Batts Moor when the heather's flowering in summer".

As a matter of fact, the whole of Joseph's war service had been spent on a ship running on time charter between Frisco and the Far East. Nothing ever happened to Joseph. He had the most amazing way of avoiding the adventures, the perils, the misfortunes which formed the raw but imaginary material of his art.

When he went to sea again he got a berth that took him clear of the war area. He did not return until late in spring of the first year of peace.

THAT summer there were more visitors than ever at Bramblewick. People felt that they could at last enjoy a holiday. Joseph as usual lived with his aunt and his cousin Emily, but from morning until night he was with his boat, which he romantically renamed the *Bonny Belle*.

One can imagine how distasteful to him was the atmosphere of that cottage. The shadow of the late Mr. Wharfe, drowned at sea twenty years before, brooded interminably over it, and the little kitchen parlor was decorated with innumerable death cards. You'd think no person in this world had ever suffered so many bereavements as that somber widow. It was no place for a story teller. The very ticking of the grandfather's clock was itself a perpetual admonition against the indulgence of all worldly pursuits.

There was no decent chair by the fireside. The widow was incredibly mean. She would not allow smoking in the house. When Joseph came in from the beach he had to walk on newspapers spread over the oilcloth to keep it from wearing. I should imagine he always went straight to bed.

But what did that matter to him? He had his boat: he had his audience—at a shilling an hour and sixpence additional! All he asked was fine weather, a smooth sea, and a pleasant company of women to listen to his yarns. Men he did not care for. Men are not instinctively romantic. Men have a photographic mind. They want accuracy, literal representation. It is not so easy for them to see that wild daubs of crude paint may represent the truth of a landscape better than an architectural drawing or a colored photograph. With men Joseph was shy and distrustful. He was selective, too, among the ladies. Youth and beauty meant nothing to him. That elderly lady, who is a regular visitor to Bramblewick, was a favorite audience.

And Emily? She was Bramblewick to her backbone. A fine, healthy girl, it was true. Fair haired and blue eyed; a good figure and a well shaped face. But dour —dour.

One could not imagine Joseph under any circumstances yarning to her. For one thing, she would have no time to listen. Her life, like that of every woman

in the place, was a restless round of domesticity. One might imagine that in her whole adult existence she had never remained seated for more than half an hour at a stretch. And apart from that what interest could she have in these stories, which had for their invariable background the familiar sea?

They're strangely unemotional, these Bramblewick folk. They seem incapable of the ordinary human passions. Look in the old churchyard, and you'll find that half the tombstones there are erected to men who died at sea. The very sound of the sea, one might think, would be a symbol of fear and hate to the living, particularly to the women.

But they have no imagination. The sea exists. It is their means of livelihood, their men go out upon it, they come back, or perhaps they don't come back, but the sea remains, inscrutable, incomprehensible, as God . . . That attitude of mind, that mute acquiescence to the inevitable is a natural adaptation to environment. Without it no woman would allow her man to go to sea, and remain behind to bear him sons to follow eventually in his footsteps.

Passion! Emily was incapable of it. Her love for Joseph was a quiet, smooth, certain thing; inevitable, unquestioning. She must have regarded him in the same light as she regarded the cottage, the grandfather clock, the black edged funeral cards, the dismal oleograph of the late Mr. Wharfe, and the hundred and one trivial and important things that made up the monotonous daily round of her life.

When Joseph went back to sea, as he did when summer was over, and all the visitors had gone, she'd pack his kit bag and see him off at the station, dry eyed and without a shake in her voice.

"Well, Joe, you're off. Mind an' wear your cholera belt when you get out foreign."

"Aye, I'll watch on. Back in July. So long, Emily."

"So long, Joe."

And when he returned when summer came again she'd greet him with unruffled complacence.

"Well, Joe, you've got back."

"Aye. How're yer keeping?"

"Oh, nicely. Mother's not so grand. Tea'll be waiting."

FOR THREE years the coming and going of Joseph was regular as the swallows' migration. One marvels how he managed it. He must have had a great reputation as a cook. He could practically choose his berth. He must have had, too, an unerring instinct for knowing whether a ship was going to be back in England in time for the summer season.

He lived for those precious three months of the year. Almost the first thing he did on his arrival was to take the protecting sail cloth from the upturned boat, scrub the paint, and then with infinite care repaint and varnish every timber of it, polish every bolt, every scrap of brass until the metal shone like gold.

But it was not the immaculate beauty of the *Bonny Belle* which made that boat the most popular among Bramblewick's lady visitors. It was Joseph's almost incredible gift for telling stories of adventure, he had never had, about places and things and people he had never seen, except in his own unbounded imagination.

A shy, nervous, hypersensitive man, extraordinarily reserved except toward those blessed with sufficient understanding to appreciate the essential characteristics of him. An artist to his fingertips. But he did not actually avoid company. Many of his yarns, most likely, were developed from odd snatches of conversation heard in the focsle, and it is clear that he had more than a sneaking envy of those men who had actually experienced the adventures they spoke about so casually.

One can understand that envy. Suppose he had been torpedoed, or shipwrecked, or attacked by Chinese pirates, or sandbagged in a foreign port; suppose that he had gone through just one of the adventures of his imagination; that he

had had a direct inspiration instead of an indirect one. Think of the difference between painting from nature and painting from a photograph, no matter how fine one's technique might be.

But nothing ever happened to Joseph; his career up to the time he joined the *Carrie Dale* was as uneventful as a city clerk's. She was a Cardiff boat, a fairly ancient tramp of some five thousand tons. She was Joseph's second berth that winter, but he hadn't been home. What attraction had Bramblewick for him when there were no visitors? Emily certainly was not one.

The *Carrie Dale* was bound for Cape Town with rails, after which she was to reload at a Congo port for Liverpool, a comfortable three months' voyage. You see how admirably that suited him. It was then the end of March. He would be back in Bramblewick in early June, just nice time for him to get his boat in trim for the holidays.

Clever though he was, however, Joseph had not reckoned with the vagaries of post-war international commerce. He made the initial mistake of signing on for the duration of the voyage—British port to British port—or two years, the common form of contract in the mercantile marine.

The day the *Carrie* finished discharging at Cape Town, her owner cabled canceling the West African run, and ordered the ship to proceed to Batavia, thence to San Francisco and some South American port.

When Joseph received that news he behaved like a caged animal. He went straight to the Old Man. He protested he'd been tricked, got to sign on under false pretences; he demanded his immediate discharge and his passage home.

Poor devil—think of him! Tied to that ship for six, possibly eight months. He had expected three at the outside. It would be midwinter at Bramblewick when he returned; no summer, no boat, no visitors, no yarning. Why, it was his life, that three months in Bramblewick.

But what could the Old Man do? Cooks — good ones — are not found on every waterfront; and there in black and white was the contract. He was kind but firm in his refusal. Joseph hurried ashore and saw the consul, the Old Man taking the precaution of sending the bosun with him. The consul was not even kind. He made a desperate round of the home bound ships that were in Table Bay. There was a forlorn hope of changing berths with some other cook. The hope did not materialize.

Desertion was out of the question. The days when a man could leave a ship and stow away on another have long since passed. Arrest would have been certain; imprisonment highly probable. He came back to the *Carrie* and made a last appeal to the Old Man to discharge him, to put him ashore sick, do anything that would free him from continuing the voyage. In vain. That night when the *Carrie* sailed, a solitary, dejected figure stood leaning over the taffrail, watching the lights of Camp's Bay sinking lower on the horizon, and the sight must have been to him like the gleam of blue sky, the singing of birds, the laughter of people to a sentenced man on his way to jail.

BUT that voyage was more cruel than any physical imprisonment. The very freedom of the broad sea, and the tall sky, and the wind and sunshine, the gulls, the flying fish, the dolphins, was an unending mockery to him. An ordinary sailor, balked in such fashion of an early reunion with his sweetheart or wife or children, would have relieved his feelings in a round of cursing, or a drinking bout, and resigned himself the inevitable.

Joseph had no smug fatalism to take refuge in. His was an artist's soul, which is at once the most joyous and the most tragic of all possessions. Would any but an artist have heard in every throb of the ship's engines what Joseph heard, or winced at the mockery in the gulls' cries, or looked up with bitter envy at the great clouds hurrying landward in the wash of the southeast trades?

Who but an artist would have experi-

enced that blind, unreasoning, extravagant hate that Joseph felt against the ship, her owner, the captain—against the sea, and everything that held him from, or mocked him of, his one fierce desire.

He saw himself the victim of a most damnable and personal plot. To him it might have been that the whole business had been deliberately planned for his frustration. He felt that he had been outraged. His heart was consumed alternately by anger, and by a fierce self-pity . . .

But the engines went on with their inexorable mockery, and the ship plunged remorselessly toward the Eastern seas. No calls were made. She was bunkered for the twenty-nine days' run to Batavia. No land was in sight after Table Mountain, and as the passage is not a very frequented one, no shipping was seen until the Australian-Red Sea route was crossed about 10° south and 90° east, when sometime after dark a big P & O, with her lights all ablaze, went by just ahead, throbbing her eighteen knots an hour homeward. She passed so close that the sound of her band drifted across the still water, that with the aid of glasses passengers in evening dress could be seen lounging on the promenade deck.

Joseph watched her from the doorway of his galley. He saw her lights sinking toward the northeastern horizon like a constellation of bright stars, and it happened that as he stood there morosely contemplating the supreme bitterness of his lot, he heard a snatch of conversation from the vague darkness along the deck.

" 'Course she's a P & O. Don't need no glasses to see her ruddy lines. Once a fortnight. Ain't I sailed on 'em? Where'll she be inside three weeks? Why, feelin' her way into Tilbury Dock. This is the line, we're right on it. Them boats—they run as though the sea was ruled for 'em. Might be rails set. But no floatin' palaces for me, wearin' blouses an' store'ats. This old tub mayn't be everybody's beer, but you does get time to think."

Inside three weeks, thought Joseph, that ship would be in England. Her crew paid off, discharged. A Bramblewick chap could be home from London in five hours. Bramblewick! Summer's promise already would be there. The gorse would be in full bloom, the heather budding, the woods green. Already the first visitors would be arriving, and the *Bonny Belle* would lie under her canvas sail, with the children playing about her, all the long summer through.

I SHALL not attempt any detailed description of the *Carrie Dale* disaster. The journalists did that efficiently, and what was it in its essentials but an all too familiar tale of the sea? The technical details may be found in the *Times*' report of the Board of Trade inquiry; the romantic ones in the files of the popular Sunday press. Read between the lines of these diverse accounts and you will obtain a fair idea of what took place from the storm onward.

Let us beware, however, of sentimentalism.

Joseph was not a hero. Heroism connotes above all things self-sacrifice. Joseph was above all things an egoist. Throughout the storm his behavior was that of a pitiful coward. It came on two days after the Australian liner had been passed. Its approach was marked by a heavy, windless cross swell from the south, an oppressive heat, a barometer that sank and sank. The ship was in ballast, and the swell made things very uncomfortable. Joseph was actually sea-sick, as bad as he had been on his first voyage. There is nothing unusual in that, of course. There are men who have been at sea all their lives and still suffer in the same way in exceptional weather. But Joseph made no effort to carry on. He turned in at the onset, and the galley boy, a West Indies negro, had to take his place.

Joseph was actually in his hammock when, during the height of the storm, the ship sprang a bad leak and the order was sent into the focsle for all hands to stand by the boats.

Throughout the forty-eight hours of

that incredible storm, when the decks were under water half the time and the bridge was smashed and two of the boats staved in, and a man had his legs broken, and not one of the officers had a wink of sleep or a meal, Joseph swung in his hammock, oblivious to everything but his own physical and mental agony. The terrified negro kept the galley fire alight, and made the men their coffee.

A hero? There was nothing heroic in that man's breast. Throughout he was actuated by one single instinct, self-preservation and by an all prevailing egoism, yet an egoism which fundamentally was impersonal, and as little under his control as the winds. His was an artist's soul, not a hero's. To call him heroic would be to attribute to him an impossible virtue. To judge him by the standard of ordinary manly conduct would be ridiculous.

But bravery and cowardice are arbitrary terms at the best, and in arriving at a true estimate of Joseph's character they are best avoided.

There were in all seven ultimate survivors of the *Carrie Dale*. Fifteen men, including the master, the first and second mate, the man whose legs were broken, and the negro galley boy went down when the ship turned turtle. It is a miracle that there were any survivors at all, for the gig was not launched. It simply slithered down the boat deck, crashed through the rails and floated clear away on the wave that was thrust up by the ship's lateral plunge.

Joseph hadn't got in then. He had been standing as well as he could by the gig's side. The same movement that flung it down the deck caused him to be flung in similar manner. He hung on to the gunwales with the passionate strength that is given to a man in the face of death. He was hauled aboard later, by the third mate, and—it is not surprising, for he had been genuinely ill, and had swallowed a great quantity of water—relapsed immediately into a state of unconsciousness from which he did not wholly recover for three days.

And so that famous voyage began. Twelve men in an open boat under a tropical sun, hundreds of miles from the nearest possible land, rations of food and water for two days—the *Carrie Dale* had gone down with unexpected suddenness—no sail, no chart, no sextant, and only a pocket compass to steer by.

It was the absence of a chart that made the situation such a dangerous and apparently hopeless one. The third mate, the only surviving officer, was young, and it was his first experience of these seas. He knew, of course, the approximate position of the ship when she foundered. He knew that the Keeling Islands lay some three hundred miles to the east. But how many mariners of life long experience could give you the dead bearing of a spot well off her ship's course from memory, and make a landfall without knowledge of the currents and the precise bearing of the starting point, and with only a pocket compass to steer by?

The engine had failed an hour before the final disaster. It had been impossible to send out a wireless S.O.S. No ships could be expected to be on the lookout therefore, or to diverge from their normal course, and the third mate rightly chose to steer south, to ignore the islands, to make the main Australian steamer route, and hang on to it in the hope of being picked up. Roughly speaking, it meant rowing some three hundred miles, a four days' passage under the most favorable conditions.

If there was a hero among the party surely it was Rodgers, the third mate. Young, inexperienced, his conduct, as the papers said, conformed to the finest traditions of the sea. The men by no means came up to the romantic conception of the British sailor. Four of them happened to be Italians. One, the bosun, was an elderly and alcoholic Swede. The rest were about as measly a crowd as one could imagine. Yet during the first two days, while the weather was still frightful, and there was nothing to do but keep the gig's head to the wind, Rodgers imbued his companions with a hope he did not

feel himself, and set a splendid example of self-sacrifice. But for him Joseph would certainly have died.

By one of those inexplicable decrees of fate Rodgers was the first to go. He died of sunstroke on the afternoon of the third day, collapsing in the very act of distributing the jealously guarded rations, his own share of which he had not touched. The command was assumed automatically by Holst, the bosun. But it was Joseph Clegg who, from the very moment of the third mate's fatal collapse, took spiritual charge of that desperate venture, that forlorn fight against the sea and the sun, against starvation and thirst, despair and madness and death.

He rose to the occasion like some splendid figure of romance. He became endowed with qualities that were superhuman. Wasted with his sickness, with the days and nights of agony he had suffered, unhardened like the rest of them with their physical toil, his hands soft, his muscles flabby, he got up from the boards where the third mate had made him lie, he took the oar from the weariest man, and he fell to with a zest that was incredible—and he sang, sang while he toiled.

Can you wonder that the journalists picked on Joseph as the heroic figure of that adventure? That it is he who will ever remain the hero of that voyage? The ship's cook, physically the weakling of the party, rising from what after all were practised men of the sea, exemplifying strength, courage, indomitable determination—commanding, coaxing, inspiring them on!

Can you wonder, too, that the journalists, dazzled by the magnificence of that apparent heroism, should fail to understand its fundamental inspiration? Could they understand, would they wish to understand, that Joseph wakening from a sleep that had been so near to death, had an inspiration that was purely aesthetic in its motive? Could they see in him the artist's soul? Who would have seen it who had not known him from childhood, who had not heard him talk, who had not seen him out on Bramblewick Bay in the summer time?

Joseph, struggling through the mists of semi-consciousness, had a vision of Bramblewick Bay in the sunshine of a languorous summer afternoon. He saw himself in his boat, the *Bonny Belle*, drifting lazily toward High Batts on the smooth flood tide. He saw himself with the oars shipped, leaning forward from his seat, and he heard the story of the *Carrie Dale* coming hot, and fervid, and inspired from his lips.

He had experienced at last an adventure. He had seen at last a tropical storm. He had heard the shrieking wet winds, and the thunder of mountainous seas, and crashing timber, and tearing canvas, and men's hoarse and anxious cries. He had heard the most dramatic of all commands, "Stand by the boats!" He had seen a deck rise vertically beneath his feet; a ship turn turtle; had heard that terrible sigh that a ship makes when her hull goes under, and the water displaces the air from her holds.

And he breathed—he lived—and it was his prison that had gone down. He was free, and there were still six weeks to the English summer . . .

AND when that vision went before the light of full consciousness the dynamic inspiration of it took complete possession of his soul. He learned from the lips of his companions, somber and despondent and hopeless in that hour of acute tragedy, what the plan of the dead mate had been. He had an immediate picture of the liner he'd seen steaming past in the night, three weeks from Tilbury. He made the men lower the dead mate over, he seized an oar and he sang; he made game of the sun, and starvation, and thirst; he bullied, cajoled, laughed and joked, and he rowed until his hands were raw, and wet with his blood.

That was the heroism of Joseph; that was the inspiration of it. Through him alone those men toiled on under the piti-

less sun; through him alone their courage was stayed in that desperate fight against the devils of the sea. Three of them died of sunstroke. Two went mad and leaped overboard; but on that afternoon, eight days after the foundering of the *Carrie* when the gig lay still upon the motionless sea, and only seven out of the original twelve survived, Joseph Clegg still babbled words of encouragement to his unlistening companions.

He sat in the stern with the tiller held in his bleeding, festering hand, his emaciated body leaning forward, but his eyes roving restlessly over the sea. The rest were sprawled upon the bottom of the boat. Three were raving, the others were silent as the corpse of the Swede, who had died at noon, and still hung over the gunwale with his face in the sea water he had started to drink.

An hour before Joseph had seen the smoke of a ship rise like the foliage of a tree from the northwestern horizon. He had watched its masts, its funnel, finally its hull rise up and move phantom-like along the eastern skyline five miles away. He had watched the hull sink down, and the funnel and masts sink down until finally no trace remained of the ship but a thin line of smoke floating in the listless air . . .

But the passing of that ship had caused him no sense of disappointment. He didn't want to go south. Bramblewick was north, a three weeks' passage north. He had laughed when the top of its masts disappeared. He had shouted to the men to stand up, and look and rejoice with him in his escape from a prison as bad as the old *Carrie Dale* had been.

Mad? Undoubtedly his mind had become unhinged by the terrible nervous and physical strain of what he had suffered. Yet through his madness that one dynamic purpose burned like an inextinguishable torch. He had a story to tell, a picture to paint, and artistic inspiration to fulfill. And to the extent of that obsession he was sane.

When shortly after dusk he heard the throbbing of a vessel's engines, he awoke instantly from the stupor he had fallen into. He stood up, and he knew that the lights he saw moving along in the darkness were those of a home bound ship. He staggered over a thwart and felt in the pockets of the dead Swede for the only box of matches the party possessed. He took off his coat and set fire to it. He waved it about above his head until he heard the screech of the *Indarra's* siren and he saw the lights become motionless. And when the *Indarra's* boat drew alongside, Joseph was lying on his back across the thwart, his arm upraised and still moving, with the smoldering coat in his hand.

So much then for the *Carrie Dale* adventure: that "Deathless Epic of the Sea" as some of the newspapers called it.

Joseph saved his own life, and the lives of those poor devils who were left in the boat. He became, thanks to the press, a national hero. The story was told again when the *Indarra* arrived at Southampton. A mob of news photographers and movie men were waiting. There was a civic reception: a public presentation to Joseph of a purse collected through the columns of a big daily paper—with no harm done to the said paper's circulation.

Joseph received heaven knows how many binoculars (useful things for a ships' cook), medals, strips of vellum. He will have enough money in the bank to save him doing another day's work till the end of his life.

It was in the middle of July when he returned to Bramblewick—the ideal month for him. He could just barely walk by then. But he was silent, as if in a daze. There was no fuss made on his arrival, a prophet returning to his own contry. There were not more than half a dozen people to meet him at the station. Emily wasn't there because she'd the cottage to "fettle". Mrs. Wharfe had died early in the Spring. For the time being another woman relative was to stay in the place "for the sake o' what folks might think."

What Emily's greeting to him was I don't know. I can guess that it was not essentially different from her customary

one, and that her talk quickly turned to a subject of perpetual dramatic interest to herself—the funeral obsequies of the late Mrs. Wharfe.

They were married the following September. The woman relative couldn't stay longer than that, and it wouldn't have been right for "those two to have gone on living under the same roof without the sanction of the church."

I don't suppose it has made much difference to Joseph one way or another. He was used to her, as he was used to the cottage and the remorseless ticking of the grandfather clock.

The *Bonny Belle* was not launched at all. As a matter of fact, she hasn't been in the water since the summer before Joseph joined the *Carrie*. Though he is physically strong, Joseph no longer pulls his shining little boat out over the blue waters of the bay, spinning, for the sheer love of it, tall tales of adventure, in far ports beyond the dimmest horizon.

The best medical attention in England has been his; and a psychologist whose fame is not limited to one continent has said that possibly, some day, Joseph Clegg will return to normal.

But I doubt it. His mind is like a swollen river dammed by a mass of lumber that owes its very solidity to the force and dead pressure of the flood. There is no outlet, no easing of the strain. He can not write. And, even if he could, I don't think it would do any good. He has learned partially to express himself with his hands; but what is that but a mere trickling of what is dammed within his artist soul?

For Joseph Clegg, the story teller, is dumb . . .

IF IT HADN'T been for young Red Brant, owner of the Bar M ranch, Buck Pearson would have been the undisputed king of Pima Valley. But Red refused to sell, or cater to Buck, and Pearson hated him. It was generally known on the range and in Buck's town of Gila Springs that war between Buck and Red Brant of the Bar M was imminent.

Things almost came to a head in Buck's saloon in Gila Springs one morning when Red came to the rescue of an old prospector called Mojave, whom Buck was about to have thrown into the street. It was a tacit challenge; but Pearson, who knew Red's speed with a gun, backed down.

"I'll get that cold eyed bobcat one of these days," Pearson told Faro Fleming, manager of his saloon and gambling house. "Nobody can cross Buck Pearson in this valley and get away with it."

Red took the old prospector out to his ranch, and got his story. Old Mojave believed that he had found at some time or other, somewhere, a fabulously rich mine; but the bullet that had badly disfigured his face had unbalanced his mind. He could remember nothing.

A short time later, as Red and Oklahoma, his foreman, were riding in from town, they came across the Pima City-Gila Springs stage overturned in the road. Both the driver, William Willis, and his only passenger, a girl, were unconscious. Oklahoma rode back to town for help, while Red removed the girl to his nearby ranch-house. When she recovered consciousness she told him that her name was Lorna Pearson, and she was looking for a man named Harold J. Pearson, whom she believed to be her father.

It was discovered that a strong box containing ten thousand dollars was missing from the stage. The money was consigned to Buck Pearson's Gila Springs bank; and, when he learned that Red Brant had visited the scene of the wreck, he tried to have a warrant sworn out for his arrest. But the arrival of Lorna Pearson in town delayed Buck's paid machinery of justice for a while.

Continuing

W. C. TUTTLE'S

New Novel of Hashknife and Sleepy

Buck refused to talk to the girl until she produced a letter, written by her mother as she was dying. Then he thawed a little.

"I reckon you're my daughter, all right," Buck admitted grudgingly. "And, as such, you've seen the last of Red Brant . . ."

Word reached Gila Springs from Pima City that a man had been murdered, and Speck Smalley, the deputy sheriff, unable to locate Mica Miller, the sheriff, rode over to investigate the killing. There he met Hashknife Hartley and his partner, Sleepy Stevens, two roving cowpunchers with a taste for mysteries. Hartley told Smalley that he was a friend of the dead man—Jim Marshall, an employee of the State penitentiary—and that Marshall was searching for an escaped convict named Joe Cross. Marshall had said Cross was a harmless old fellow, bereft of his memory by a bullet wound in the head.

It did not occur to Smalley to link Old Mojave, whom Red Brant had befriended

The SCAR *of* FATE

in the Gila Springs saloon, with the hunted convict, Joe Cross.

Smalley invited Hashknife and Sleepy to ride back to Gila Springs with him. On the way he told them what he knew of the Red Brant-Buck Pearson feud. On their arrival, they found everybody talking about the disappearance of Mica Miller, the sheriff.

"Where is he, anyway, Smalley?" Hashknife asked the deputy curiously, as they were seated in the sheriff's little office.

Before Smalley could reply, two cowboys galloped up and dismounted.

"We found Mica Miller," gulped one. "Deader'n hell—down south of Brant's ranch-house . . ."

"START all over again," interrupted Speck.

Brown swallowed thickly.

"We found Mica Miller, deader 'n—"

"That's plenty," said Speck. "One of you git the coroner, an' I'll— You shore he's dead?"

"He—he wouldn't be actin' thataway jist to fool us, would he?" asked Ralston, mopping his face with a dirty bandanna handkerchief. "You go git the coroner, Buzz."

Ralston leaned a shoulder against the building and took a deep breath. Speck was going toward the stable and Buzz was heading up the street. Ralston turned to Hashknife.

"We was tryin' to drive a old white face bull over to the road," he said. "Ornery old brute. He'd herd all right, if he ever struck a road. Shoved him across this here arroyo, and my bronc almost stepped on this here dead man. He's a-layin' on his back, drilled plumb through the head, an' his gun ain't even out of his holster. Somebody laid for him, shore."

"Notice anythin' else around there?" asked Hashknife.

"Never even looked," said Ralston.

Sleepy was coming across the street; so Hashknife called to him and they went down to the livery stable to get their horses.

"Dead sheriff," explained Hashknife. Sleepy merely grunted.

The coroner was very careful to keep everybody away from the body until he and the deputy had made their examination. From where the body lay they could see the Bar M ranch at the bottom of the slope, not over three hundred yards away.

Hashknife's keen eye took in all the surroundings, and while the rest of the men prepared to move the body, he rode farther down the little dry arroyo, where he dismounted and slid down the silty bank to the bottom. Here were men's tracks in the deep sand; at least the tracks of one man, going north.

Hashknife could hear the coroner giving directions to the men who were carrying the body, and as he worked around a bend, coming in almost directly below where the body had been found, he stopped suddenly and scanned the ground closely. He was about fifteen feet below where the body had lain, and here were the tracks of men, mingled with those of horses.

And here also was the imprint of a rectangular object, deep in the sand. Hashknife's mind flashed back to the shape and size of the regular strong box usually carried on stages. He examined the tracks, but the yielding sand and silt made it impossible to distinguish more than the difference between the track of a man and the track of a horse.

There were hoof prints leading away from the spot—going south—but none of men. There was only one set of footprints going away, and those led north. Suddenly Hashknife grunted aloud and swept up an object nearly buried in the sand.

It was a Colt .45, with a pearl handle, the barrel and cylinder beautifully engraved. It glistened in the sunlight as Hashknife looked it over. It contained two loaded shells and four empties. Slipping the gun inside his shirt, he went back to his horse. The others were far down the slope, carrying the sheriff's body, heading for the coroner's buggy down on the Bar M road.

Hashknife rode down along the arroyo to where it opened out on the gravel slope below. That one set of tracks came out, but he lost them on the hard ground. Studying the situation for awhile, he rode back and caught up with the others.

There were no expressions from any one. If any one of them had a suspicion as to who had shot Mica Miller, he did not speak his mind. Sleepy looked anxiously at Hashknife, but the lean face of the tall cowboy told him nothing.

Mica Miller was an old-timer in the valley, well known by every one; and Pima Valley would demand his murderer. There was no question of its being murder, because his gun was still in its holster. Speck Smalley, his face the picture of gloom, sat down in his office after they had disposed of the body.

"What in hell was Mica doin' over on that little arroyo?" he demanded of the wide world. "What's your bet, Hartley?"

"I never bet—" Hashknife smiled—"but I make guesses. It wasn't far from there where the stage was ditched an' the money taken. Kinda looks as though Miller had an idea who took it, an' where they took it; so he sneaked in on 'em when they tried to bust the box, an' they busted him."

"Feller, you've got a idea! That's what happened, by golly! They killed Miller an' then hightailed it with the box. But dang his hide, why didn't he let me in on it?"

"Mebbe he wanted to be sure."

"Mebbe he—say! He didn't leave here until dark. How did he know they was over there in that arroyo?"

Hashknife smiled over his cigaret.

"Smalley, was Mica Miller on the square?"

"Square as a dollar. Why do you ask that?"

"Are you sure he wasn't out there to get his split of the money, an' they—"

"Hell, no!"

"All right—that's fine. It was jist a suggestion. You know, some of our honest officers have gone crooked."

"I know; but Mica was honest."

Hashknife smoked slowly, thoughtfully. After awhile he asked—

"Have you got any extra fancy cowpunchers around here, Smalley?"

"Meanin' which?"

"Oh, the kind that wear a lotta silver on their ridin' rigs, pack fancy guns, an' all that kinda stuff."

Smalley shook his head.

"I dunno any. 'Course, some of the boys dude up on dance nights an' Sunday, but I dunno any that wear silver an' fancy guns. Them things cost lots of money—more'n a forty-a-month cowboy can afford. What your idea?"

"Oh, I was jist wonderin'."

"Oh, I see, you kinda wanted to know which puncher needed money."

"Somethin' like that, Smalley. You'll be Sheriff Smalley, now."

"That's right. I reckon I'll be pretty good. Anyway, I don't owe Buck Pearson anythin'."

Hashknife laughed softly.

"You ain't so crazy about Pearson, eh?"

"Well, Buck's all right, but I want to be my own boss."

"That's right."

"Say! You asked about fancy punchers an' I forgot to say that Red Brant goes kinda fancy once in awhile."

"Does, eh? Plenty silver on his pants an' a fancy gun?"

"No-o-o—not any fancy gun; but he does wear gaudy stuff."

Just at that moment the prosecuting attorney, Charles Bass, came in. Bass was middle aged, hard of face, slightly stooped. His hair was iron-gray, worn rather long, and with his hawk-like cast of features he greatly resembled an old actor of a vanished school.

He nodded shortly to Hashknife and turned to Speck.

"You are acting as sheriff, Smalley," he said. "Under the circumstances, I believe it is necessary to bring Red Brant in for examination."

"You want him arrested, Charley?"

"Yes; I'll give you a warrant."

"Did Pearson advise it?" asked Speck.

"What the hell has Pearson to do with it? Pearson isn't running my office. Is he running this one?"

"I jist wanted to git a rise out of you, you damn old crab!" Smalley laughed. "I reckon we'll git along all right."

"Go easy with Red Brant."

"Tell me somethin' I don't know," retorted Smalley, getting to his feet. "Want to go along, Hartley?"

Hashknife smiled and shook his head.

CHAPTER VII

PEARSON'S FOREMAN

BUCK PEARSON had little to say to Lorna on their ride to the HP ranch. She tried to talk with him about her mother, but he refused to discuss her. Lorna was disappointed in the

HP. Buck's wealth did not show in his ranch buildings. He had taken over the old place and had done little to improve it.

Lorna's room was more like a white-washed cell than a lady's boudoir.

Old Dopey John Dowling, the cook and housekeeper, looked upon her with deep suspicion. He did not like women around. But Lorna smiled upon him, and he melted a little.

"My name's Dowling," he told her.

"And I am Miss Pearson," replied Lorna.

"Yea-a-a-ah? Well, can you beat that. Some kin of Bucks?"

"Yes—his daughter."

Dowling opened his mouth wide, closed it slowly and opened it wide again.

"Didja ever see such ha'r on a dawg!" he snorted. "E-magine that! Well, I'm pleased to meetcha, anyway." He backed away.

It was very quiet around the ranch. Lorna found an old magazine which she took out on the wide porch, where she found a comfortable chair. Bees droned around some flowering vines on the porch, birds danced along the railing, calling softly. It was so peaceful that Lorna was half asleep when Tex Thorne came back to the ranch.

Tex was full of liquor and news. He turned his horse over to a Mexican at the stable and came stumbling up the steps. He stopped short at sight of Lorna, and a leering grin wreathed his lips.

"Hyah, Minnie—or whatever your name is—"he laughed—"you shore seem to be at home around here."

"Tex!" snapped Dowling's voice, and the foreman turned to see the old cook signaling frantically from inside the room.

Tex leered at Lorna, but went inside, where Dowling forcibly drew him into the kitchen.

"You damn all kinds of fool!" he snorted. "Actin' thataway! Tex, that's Buck's daughter."

"Buck's—" Tex stared at Dopey for several moments, then burst into a laugh. "Don't be a damn idiot, Dopey. Buck's daughter! He ain't got no daughter."

Tex cuffed his hat sidewise on his head and looked at the cook.

"You tryin' to be funny with me, Dopey?" he added doubtfully.

"I shore ain't. She told me so herself. An' if Buck heard what you said to her out there, he'd raise hell with you."

Tex smiled grimly. Buck's daughter! Buck had never mentioned having a daughter.

"Buck introduce you to her, Dopey?"

"No, he never did—she introduced herself."

"Uh-huh. So that's it, eh? Daughter! Well, I'll be damned! Where's Buck?"

"I ain't seen him since they came. He's prob'ly around here somewhere."

Dopey glanced through a side window.

"There he goes now, goin' around to the front."

Tex turned and walked back through the house. Buck was coming up the steps to Lorna. He stopped as Tex spoke to him.

"They found Mica Miller's body out near the Bar M, Buck. He'd been shot through the head."

Buck's mouth sagged a little as he looked at Tex.

"Mica Miller dead?"

Tex nodded.

"They brought the body in a little while before I left. Buzz an' Jack were bringin' that old white faced bull across to the road, an' they found the corpse."

"I'll be damned!" said Buck softly.

"An' the prosecutin' attorney sent Speck out to arrest Red Brant."

Lorna got quickly to her feet.

"To arrest Red Brant for what?"

"Murder." Tex smiled.

"When was this murder committed?" she asked.

"Last night, I reckon."

Lorna shook her head quickly.

"Red Brant never fired those shots. He was with me."

Buck grinned and turned to Tex.

"She told me all about it on the way out here, Tex. She was on the stage, ridin' in from Pima City to see if I was her father, an' you know what happened to the stage.

She says Red Brant found her an' carried her over to the Bar M. I reckon that'll be Red's alibi for not bein' there at the stage. She don't remember nothin', until she woke up at the ranch."

Buck and Tex looked at each other for several moments. Finally Tex turned back to her.

"What do you mean when you say Red never fired *those* shots?"

Lorna explained as well as she could about the shots, and about Mojave being missing from the ranch. Buck and Tex exchanged glances.

"How many shots were fired?" asked Buck.

"I do not know exactly, but there were several; some near the ranch and two, I believe, farther out in the hills, a little later."

"Red an' Oklahoma were there with you, eh?"

"Don't tell a soul what you've told us," warned Buck.

"But they haven't any right to arrest Red Brant."

"Don't worry about Red Brant. We'll see that he's taken care of, all right. You better wash for supper, Tex; I think it's ready."

THAT supper at the HP was rather a quiet affair. Only Lorna, Buck and Tex were at the table in the ranch-house, the rest of the cowboys being fed in the lean-to dining room. Tex had more liquor before supper, and he seemed rather sullen. He watched Lorna, and Buck scowled at him, but did not mention the fact that Tex's actions were at all out of place. It caused Lorna to be uneasy.

"You go to town an' see what you can hear," ordered Buck after they finished supper.

"I wasn't figurin' on goin' down," said Tex sullenly.

Buck said nothing more, but took his hat and left the room. Dowling came in to clear away the dishes, and Lorna went to her room.

"Know any more about her?" queried the cook.

"Not a damn thing."

Lorna went out on the porch, and a little later she saw Buck and Tex down near the corral, where Tex was saddling a horse. It seemed to her that they were arguing violently, but she could not hear their voices. Finally Tex rode away, not looking back.

Buck watched him ride off and started for the house, but seemed to change his mind. After several moments of indecision, he walked back to the stable, where he saddled a horse and also rode toward town. It was nearly dark, and Lorna had never felt so lonely in her life. There was an atmosphere around the place that she did not like. She would have even welcomed the company of some of the cowboys, who were out in the bunkhouse, playing a guitar and singing mournful songs.

She went back to the main room, where she lighted a lamp and sat down to peruse an old magazine, when she heard a soft scratching at the back door. Turning her head quickly, she saw Red Brant grinning at her. He glanced behind himself and signaled her to be careful. She got up and went slowly back to him.

"They didn't find you?" she said softly.

"Who was that, Lorna?"

"The sheriff—the officers. They—they were going to arrest you for murder."

"Thasso? Who am I supposed to have killed?"

"The sheriff. They found him near your place today."

"Mica Miller dead? He is? God! An' they think I killed him, eh?"

"Those shots last night," reminded Lorna.

"By golly, that's right! Have Buck an' Tex gone to town? I thought that's who it was, but they didn't go together."

"Aren't you taking a big risk in coming here, Red?"

"I'm takin' big chances in bein' any place." He grinned. "But I'm not worried any. I've been back there in the hills all afternoon, watchin' things, an' I

saw you come out here with Buck."

"Why were you watching things?"

"Oh, just watchin'. Is Buck Pearson your father?"

"Yes," replied Lorna softly.

"Pshaw! How does he act toward you?"

"Not exactly fatherly." Lorna smiled. "He seems rather stunned over it."

"Uh - huh," said Red thoughtfully. "You goin' to stay here?"

Lorna shook her head.

"No, I couldn't do that. I can't describe it, but every one seems so unfriendly."

"You didn't feel that way about my place, didja, Lorna?"

"That was different. It would be impossible for me to stay here. In fact, I have no desire to stay. There is no reason why there should be any affection between myself and my father."

"That's right; but how are you goin' to git along? I mean, won't you have to get a job?"

"Not for awhile, at least, Red. I have some money from my mother's estate, you see."

"You ain't rich, are you, Lorna?"

"Far from being rich."

"I jist wondered if you was. Let's go out an' sit in the patio for awhile."

"All right, but you must not stay long, Red. If they found you here—"

"The officers?"

"Yes."

Red laughed softly.

"Lorna, this is the last place on earth they'd ever expect to find me."

They sat down on an old bench against the wall, shadowed by the big oaks.

"I left my horse out in the brush," said Red. "There's an old bench over there an' a broken place in the wall where I can get over awful fast. But they couldn't see us here, even if they came into the patio. Your clothes are dark enough to mix with the shadow, an' there won't be much moon tonight." He fell silent then, to ask after a long interval—

"You ain't mad at me for comin' here, are you, Lorna?"

"No; I'm glad you came."

"I'm glad, too. You know, I've been wonderin' why you came here huntin' your father."

"It was my mother's wish, Red. I don't know all the reasons for my father going away. I was only five years of age at the time, and we lived just outside Chicago, where my father had started a small manufacturing business. I think he left home suddenly, and later we moved to Chicago, where my mother handled the business. Mother never told me much about it. I had never seen a picture of my father, because my mother destroyed all of them.

"But I know she worried about him, and when the doctors told her she could not live long, she begged me to try to find him. She wanted him to have the business, and she wanted me to give him a letter. She said it would allow him to come back, although I do not know why he couldn't have come back at any time."

"You gave that letter to Buck?" asked Red.

"Yes, I gave it to him."

"Didn't he have anythin' to say about it?"

"Not a word. It was written only a day before she died, Red."

"I'm shore sorry about her dyin', Lorna. My mother died too—when I was jist a kid. I never did know my dad—he kicked off ahead of my memory."

"And you are an orphan, too, Red?"

"Yeah, but not *too*. You've still got a father."

"I don't feel that I have. But what are you going to do, if they arrest you for murder?"

"They ain't done it yet, Lorna."

"But they will, won't they?"

"Mebbe. Let's talk about pleasanter things. Lordy, you never can tell—this might be the last time we'll ever have a chance to talk like this. I've been out there in the hills all day wishin' for somethin' like this; hopin' I'd get a chance to see you."

"You haven't had any dinner, Red?"

"No, I don't reckon I have. But as hungry as I am, I'd rather set an' talk

with you than to have a big dish of ice cream."

"Do you like ice cream, Red?"

"Like it? I love it!"

AND so they sat there in the deep shadows and talked of things that did not concern the folks of Pima Valley; things that only concern a man and a maid, while the stars twinkled down, bathing the old patio walls and the old oaks in a blue glow. From the bunkhouse came the soft twanging of two guitars, as a reedy tenor sang softly:

"Rio Rose, the dawn is breaking
As I ride my lonely way;
Rio Rose, my heart is aching,
Aching for you every day.
Down along the Rio Grande,
Where we swore we'd never part,
But you broke a promise given,
And you broke a cowboy's heart."

Lorna looked at her watch. It was nearly eleven o'clock. Hours that had been but a few moments in passing. A dog barked down at the corrals.

"Somebody's coming back," said Lorna. "It is nearly eleven, Red."

"Gosh!"

"I had better go in before they come up to the house, because they will come through the patio."

They heard one of the cowboys call from the bunkhouse, and some one answered him; some one coming toward the patio. Red flattened against the wall as Lorna slipped into the house.

It was Buck Pearson. Red recognized him as he came across the patio and went into the house. He listened, but did not hear Buck call to Lorna. He probably thought she was asleep in her room. Still Red did not go away. The guitars were strumming again.

Buck came to the doorway. Red could see his features in the light of his cigaret. He seemed to be standing there, waiting for some one. Several minutes passed, but Buck did not move. Again the dog barked at the corrals. Buck swung out from the house and walked swiftly over to the patio gate, where he stood until another man joined him.

Red strained his ears to hear what was said, but they were talking softly, though apparently angrily. He heard Buck say, "Don't lie to me, Tex," but was unable to hear Tex's reply. After possibly two minutes of conversation they came toward the house, stopping about in the center of the patio. Red could hear them now. Buck drawled sarcastically—

"Yeah, an' I trailed you."

"You did, eh?" growled Tex Thorne.

"Yes, an' don't you try doublecrossin' me, Tex."

"Don't be a damn fool. You're drunk, Buck."

"I'm neither a fool nor drunk. I had a hunch you wouldn't go to town. Oh, sure, you went to town—later. You had to bring me the news. Now, damn you, tell me the truth!"

"Don't you call me a liar!"

Suddenly there was the flash and the roar of a shot. One man was falling. Red jerked back. It had all been done very quickly. One man was running into the house—it was Buck Pearson. The other man was only a dark blur on the old flags of the patio.

The music had ceased in the bunkhouse. Some one yelled. The cowboys were pounding toward the patio gate. Red Brant came to life. It would never do for them to find him in there. He ducked low and ran for the corner of the wall, where there was an old bench and a broken place in the wall.

He misjudged it in the dark and struck his knee against the bench. A voice yelled from inside the gate:

"Who the hell's that? Over there!"

"Somebody's been shot!"

"It's Tex!"

Red was going over the wall, silhouetted against the sky.

"Stop him, boys!"

Two shots came almost together. One smashed the wall just below Red, the other seared like a hot iron across his shoulder as he sprang off the wall. He

landed safely and headed off across the brushy country, safe so far as pursuit was concerned. They could never catch him now. Two hundred yards away was his horse, as fast as any animal in the whole valley.

Back in the patio the cowboys were examining Tex Thorne, when Buck came out, *sans* his boots and shirt.

"What happened?" he demanded. "What was the shootin' about?"

"Somebody got Tex cold," a cowboy told him. "Somebody was layin' for him here in the patio. He went over the wall an' got away."

"Bring him in," said Buck huskily, "an' one of you head for town an' get the doctor."

They took Tex inside and placed him on a couch.

"No use goin' for a doctor," said a cowboy dryly. "The feller that got Tex made a sure job of it. Look, will you; they was so close they burned his shirt."

"I guess you're right, Buzz," said Buck. "Anyway, you better go an' get the coroner—an' the sheriff. This looks like murder."

"Yeah, it shore does show some of the earmarks."

"But what about that feller in the patio?" asked Buck huskily.

"I dunno who he was," said Terrill. "He went over the wall down at the corner. Me an' Buzz each took a shot at him, but it was like takin' a shot at a bird on the wing."

BUCK nodded with complete understanding. The boys filed out slowly. Buck helped himself to a drink from a bottle, staring at Tex's body. No one suspected that Buck had shot Tex. But who was that man in the patio? The breaks were with Buck.

He looked across the room at Lorna's door, walked over and knocked softly.

"Yes?" she queried.

"Nothin'," he said shortly. "You don't need to come out. I jist wondered if you was awake."

"What was it—the shooting?" she asked nervously.

"Some one was hidin' in the patio an' shot Tex Thorne," he replied. "Go to sleep an' forget it; we'll tell you about it in the mornin'."

"Is he—he badly hurt?" she asked.

"He's dead. Don't worry about it; things like that happen."

Buck smiled grimly to himself and went back to take another drink.

A sudden idea struck him, and he walked back to her door.

"Lorna," he called softly.

"Yes?"

"Can you come to the door?"

Lorna donned a dressing robe and opened the door a little way. She was trembling, as Buck looked her over coldly.

"How long was Red Brant here this evenin'?" he asked. "He was there in the patio when I came in, an' I wondered how long he had been here."

Lorna did not know he was bluffing her into a confession. It was only a shrewd guess on his part—a trap question—and she thought he really knew.

"I—I don't know how long he was here," she said.

"You left him there when you came in, eh?"

"Yes."

"That's all," he said. "You go back to—"

"You don't mean to say that Red Brant shot Tex Thorne, do you?"

Buck shrugged his shoulders and turned away from the door.

"That's for the law to decide," he said meaningly.

"But he didn't do it!" she insisted.

Buck whirled around and moved back toward her.

"How do you know?" he demanded. "Where was you when the shot was fired?"

"Why, I was in here—but—"

"You jist *guess* he didn't shoot. Wait'll you try to match guesses with a jury. Now, you trot back to bed an' forget it. Red Brant should have more sense than to come around here. Prob'ly won't have,

though, 'cause they'll hang him before he ever has any sense."

"Hang him!"

Buck laughed harshly and walked back to his bottle. Lorna closed the door, turned back toward the center of the room, but stopped short. Her window was half open, and there was Red Brant, leaning inside the room, a gun dangling in his right hand. He motioned her to be silent and come over to him.

And in the dim light from the old lamp she could see the blood on the shoulder of his shirt.

"That's just a scratch," he told her softly. "One of 'em got me as I went over the fence. They didn't chase me, so I came back. I had to find out what had been said an' done. I heard what Buck told you, Lorna."

"But you didn't kill him, Red!" she protested.

"No, I didn't."

"Buck Pearson?"

"He's your father, Lorna."

"I know; but right is right."

"I know it is, but I'd never prove it to a jury. Buck has been tryin' to cinch me for a long time, an' this is his big chance. They want me for two murders, now. There ain't a man in the valley, except Oklahomy, who would help me. I can't fight Pearson an' his outfit in court; so I'll jist have to keep out of jail. I think Speck Smalley is on the square, an' if you git a chance, tell Speck what happened, Lorna. I've got to go now—an' I'll prob'ly never see you again."

"But you are innocent, Red!"

"I know, but the cards are stacked against me. If they don't git me before I reach home, I'll be able to keep 'em guessin' a long time. Goodby, Lorna; I shore like you a lot."

He started to shake hands with her but jerked back quickly. Lorna heard a short exclamation, a savage grunt, the sound of a blow. She was rooted to the spot, staring at the open window. Red appeared again, a grin on his lips.

"What is it?" she cried.

"Shut and fasten your window," he whispered, panting a little. "*Buenas noches, querida mia.*"

"*Hasta luego,*" she replied.

"She knew what I said to her!" marveled Red, as he hurried back to his horse. "I said 'Good night, sweetheart,' and she said, 'Until we meet again.' Bronc, there'll be a lot of cows shipped to Chicago before I'll ever see her again."

And he rode silently down a long, brushy draw, struck open country below the HP ranch-house, and galloped down across the hills.

Back at the HP, Tony Ariza and Yaqui Alvarez decided to keep Buck company until the coroner and sheriff arrived. They came to the back door and found Dopey Dowling sitting on the steps, holding his head in both hands.

"W'at 'appen from you?" asked Yaqui.

Dowling grunted dismally.

"Dronk?" asked Tony.

"Theese cook he's act seek," decided Yaqui.

Dopey got weakly to his feet, and they helped him inside. Buck was in a chair, owl eyed from too much liquor. Tony took one look at the body of Tex Thorne, crossed himself piously and looked at Dopey, whose face was bloody from a wound on his head. Buck grunted wonderingly.

"What happened to you, Dopey?" he asked.

Dopey felt of his sore head and looked foolishly around.

"Damn, I shore got socked," he muttered. "I wonder where he went?"

"Where who went?"

"Red Brant. He was at that woman's winder, talkin' to her, an' I made a sneak on him."

"You did, eh? Have a drink, you poor ignorant fool. You sneaked in on him an' he pistol whipped you, eh?"

"I reckon that's what happened, but my idea was that he hit me with a handful of skyrockets."

It was nearly an hour later when the boys came back with the coroner and Sheriff Speck Smalley. Buck was able to add little to what had already been told,

except that Red Brant had been concealed in the patio. Buck told how he had obtained his information from Lorna, and Dowling told what Red had done to him. The doctor bandaged Dowling's head.

"Do you want to talk to the girl?" asked Buck.

"I don't," answered Speck.

"She'll have to testify at the inquest," said the coroner. "No use getting her out of bed now."

"Are you goin' after Red Brant tonight?" asked Buck.

"I wasn't plannin' on it," replied Speck.

"No? You wait awhile, an' you'll never catch him."

"Yeah? Well, I'll tell you," drawled Speck. "I ain't been officially notified yet that I'm the new sheriff; so I'm takin' my orders right now from the prosecutin' attorney. After I'm officially notified, I'll take no orders from anybody. I wasn't elected, an' I'm not runnin' next election—so I'm all set to run the office by myself."

"We'll hold the inquest here tomorrow," said the coroner. "No one saw Red Brant kill Tex Thorne, I understand. The mere fact that Red happened to be here isn't direct evidence that he killed Thorne; but if you want to charge him with murder, Buck, I suppose you can get a warrant in Gila Springs tonight."

Buck smiled grimly and shook his head.

"What's the use? If Red sneaked back here, he knows what we think, an' he'll be miles away by daylight. Go ahead with your inquest, find him guilty of murder, an' let the county offer a 'dead or alive' reward for him. It's not a personal matter with me. Anyway, there's a warrant out for him already."

And Speck Smalley laughed.

CHAPTER VIII

HASHKNIFE ASKS A FEW QUESTIONS

IT SEEMED as though everybody in Pima Valley was at the inquest on the Pearson ranch. The main room was filled, and others sat on the porch at open windows. A jury was sworn in and Buck's testimony was taken. He told of being in Gila Springs, of coming home about eleven o'clock. He said he was undressing when he heard the shot fired.

He said he heard some one yelling in the patio, and two more shots were fired before he got out there.

"Who fired the last two?" asked the coroner.

"I believe it was Buzz Brown an' Ab Terrill. Some one was climbing over the patio wall, an' they shot at him."

"Was Tex Thorne dead at that time?"

"I guess he was. Anyway, he was dead when we brought him in here."

They excused Buck and called Buzz Brown, who testified that he had been in the bunkhouse when the first shot was fired, and that he and Terrill had shot at the man going over the wall. Terrill's testimony was the same.

"Did any of you try to catch this man?" asked the coroner.

"Wasn't much use, we didn't think," replied Terrill. "He could easy dodge us in the dark, so we didn't go after him."

Hashknife was an interested listener. He saw Buck Pearson whisper to the coroner, who called for Lorna Pearson. There was a hush as the girl took the witness stand. She gave her name, also her residence.

"Are you any relation to Buck Pearson?"

"Yes—his daughter."

There was an immediate buzz of whispering, but the coroner silenced the crowd.

"You heard the shot fired that killed Tex Thorne?"

"I heard a shot fired; and in a few moments two more were fired."

"Were you in bed at the time?"

"No, sir."

"As a matter of fact, you had been entertaining a young man in the patio, had you not?"

"What's the use to tellin' her she was, an' then askin' a question?" queried Speck Smalley.

"I am conducting this examination," flared the coroner.

"Go ahead."

"Was that young man Red Brant?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he was still in the patio when you went into the house."

"I suppose he was."

"How soon after you left him did Buck Pearson come in?"

"Possibly a minute. But he did not stay in. I heard—"

"Confine yourself to questions, Miss Pearson. You talked with Buck Pearson after the shooting?"

"Yes; he called me and asked how long Red Brant had been there at the ranch."

"What did you tell him?"

"That ain't got a thing to do with it," interrupted Speck. "As long as we know he was here at the time Tex was killed, that's plenty."

"Yeah, an' he was here afterwards," spoke up Dopey Dowling. "He sneaked back an' talked through the open winder with that there girl. I sneaked in an' tried to capture him, but he socked me over the head with a six-gun bar'l—an' got away."

This brought a laugh from the crowd. The coroner turned to Lorna.

"Why did he come back and talk with you, Miss Pearson?"

"I don't think that is any of your business, Doc," said Speck. "It's a foolish question—an' if you had any sense at all, you'd never expect her to answer it."

"Why not?" demanded the coroner warmly.

"Didn't you ever have a girl, Doc?"

The crowd chuckled again, and the coroner's face grew red. That ended the testimony, and the jury retired to deliberate. Hashknife drew Speck aside and asked him if he knew Miss Pearson. Speck didn't; but at that same time Lorna came to the sheriff.

"May I have a word in private with you?" she asked.

"Y'betcha." Speck grinned. "C'mon."

Speck led her out of earshot, and while all the crowd on the porch watched them curiously, Lorna told Speck what Red had asked her to tell him. Speck rubbed his chin thoughtfully and listened.

"Well, dawgone!" he grunted. "Can you beat that? Ma'm, you was a-tryin' to tell that jury about Buck not stayin' in the house."

"Yes," nodded Lorna. "He came in, went out again—anyway, I think he did. And I believe he came in after the shooting was over—I mean the first shot."

"Uh-huh! You didn't see him, but you think you heard him."

"Yes, that is true; I only heard him."

The coroner called to them, and they went back to hear the decision of the jury—that Red Brant be arrested and held on suspicion of murdering Tex Thorne. That ended the inquest. Hashknife and Sleepy rode back with Smalley, who said nothing of what Lorna had told him.

"Didja see Oklahomy there?" asked Speck as they rode back.

"I don't know him," replied Hashknife.

Speck grinned.

"He's packin' the verdict to Red right now. If I was a smart officer I'd trail Oklahomy."

"Ain't you smart?" asked Sleepy.

"Not too smart."

"You don't believe Red killed him, that's your trouble." Hashknife laughed.

"I wish I could prove he didn't, Hartley—but I can't, an' I don't believe any man can."

"Mebbe not. But what's bein' done about that ten thousand dollars?"

"Nothin'. That's gone."

"Can you fasten the murder of the sheriff on Red Brant?"

"Nope. By golly, I've got to have a talk with that girl. She was at Red's ranch the night Mica got killed. I'll betcha forty dollars she's stuck on Red Brant."

"An' she's Buck Pearson's daughter."

"Yeah, that's right. But she'd put the—" Speck stopped.

"She'd put what?" asked Hashknife. "Was you goin' to say she'd put the deadwood on Buck, even if she is his daughter?"

"Hell, I never said anythin'. Forgit it." Speck chewed his lower lip thought-

fully for several moments; then he asked, "You ain't one of them there mind readers, are you?"

"Thank you," said Hashknife. It was a good answer to his question.

SPECK pulled up at the office, while Hashknife and Sleepy went on, as if going to the livery stable; but they did not stop until they pulled in at the Bar M ranchhouse. Old Oklahoma was sitting on the porch, and he looked them over keenly, perhaps a trifle belligerently.

Suey Ong came to the doorway to see who they were, and old Mojave came around the corner, a collie following him. There was immediately little question in Hashknife's mind that this old man was Joe Cross, the escaped convict.

"Yeah, I seen you at the inquest," said Oklahoma, after Hashknife had introduced himself and Sleepy. "They kinda put the deadwood on Red, didn't they? Lotta damn fools, that jury."

"Red was foolish to go out there last night," said Hashknife.

"Wanted to see that woman. I tell you, a woman'll ruin you shore as hell."

"Velly nice gi'l," said Suey Ong.

"First class," added Mojave.

"What the hell!" snorted Oklahoma. "You don't even know who we're talkin' about."

"I s'pose not. I don't remember very well."

"Led velly nice boy," offered Suey Ong. "He no shoot. One man shoot him in shoulda—I fix velly nice."

Hashknife pricked up his ears quickly.

"Ain't that like a chink?" wailed Oklahoma.

"One of them jaspers nicked him, eh?" Hashknife asked.

"Yeah—creased his shoulder. Didn't hurt him much."

"I wish you'd tell me what happened here that night—when the sheriff got killed."

"What's the idea?"

"I'm curious, that's all."

"You ain't workin' for Buck Pearson?"

"No; I'm not workin' for anybody."

Oklahoma looked keenly at Hashknife for several moments, then scratched his head thoughtfully, as if trying to recall something.

"What didja say your name was?" he asked.

"Hashknife Hartley."

"Hash—say! Was you ever in Lo Lo Valley?"

"Yeah, we was both there one time."

"Great gosh! Hashknife Hartley! No, you wouldn't remember me. I was workin' for Eph King, the big sheepman—workin' on the Turkey Track ranch. Man, the cleanin' you gave Eph's outfit! But you was right. By golly, you—well, I'll be darned!"

"It was quite a time we had." Hashknife smiled.

"Time! Well, skin my dogies! Suey Ong, shake hands with two of the best men that ever came over the hill. Mojave! Stand up an' wiggle the paws of these here two fellers. You won't remember—but do it."

It was rather a solemn ceremony.

"I don't remember either of you," sighed Mojave. "Where didja say we knew 'em, Oklahomy?"

"Never mind, Mojave. Suey Ong, go ahead an' kill off a couple chickens, an' if you've got any 'preciation in your yaller skin, you'll wrangle a herd of them there noodles for supper."

"Can do velly nice." Suey Ong grinned.

"Now," said Oklahoma, "I'm plumb ready to tell you everythin' I know—an' I'll begin with the wreck of the stage."

Oklahoma was not an artistic story teller, but he was strong on detail; and when he had finished Hashknife had a complete résumé of the valley crimes. He rolled a cigaret and settled down to think things over. Mojave sat on a lower step, petting the dog, apparently thinking of nothing. After a long period of silence, Hashknife turned to Oklahoma.

"Do you know anybody who owns a fancy six-shooter? It must have a pearl handle, an' the barrel and cylinder are all engraved."

"Why—yea-a-a-ah, I do. We've got one like that here. It belongs to Red, but he never packs it."

"Lemme see it, will you?"

Oklahoma was gone quite awhile, but came back empty handed.

"That's damn funny," he said. "It's allus been there in Red's room, hangin' on the wall—but it's gone now."

"Colt .45?"

"Shore. What do you know about it?"

"I found it in the sand at the bottom of that little arroyo, jist below where they found the dead sheriff. It had been shot four times."

"You did? Well, I'll—now, wouldn't that make you fight your hat? How'd that gun git over there, do you suppose. Red wasn't over there. You don't suppose—hey! Mojave."

"Yeah?" queried Mojave.

"Did you take Red's gun out of his room?"

"Red's gun?" queried Mojave. "I ain't got his gun."

"Did you ever have it?"

"I dunno."

"An' there you are—he dunno. Hashknife, he was missin' that night. We looked all over for him, an' didn't see him till mornin'."

"Mojave," said Hashknife kindly, "did you shoot at a man here in this yard one night?"

"Shoot at a man? What night was that?"

"Ain't he great!" Oklahoma snorted.

Hashknife smiled at Mojave.

"Did you ever know a man named Joe Cross?"

Mojave wrinkled his brow thoughtfully, his eyes searching Hashknife's face.

"Joe Cross? Where'd he used to live, anyway? I kinda remember a man by the name of—what was that name again?"

"Joe Cross."

"Oh, yeah. No, I don't reckon I knew him very well, 'cause I can't remember what he looked like. In fact, I can't remember his name."

"Never mind that part of it, Mojave. They tell me you like to prospect."

"Shore do. Found me a rich mine once."

"That so? What did you do with it?"

"That's as far as I can remember. Oh, I guess I'm gettin' kinda forgetful. Sometimes I remember somethin' about that mine. Mebbe I jist dreamed it; I dunno. Anyway, it shore was rich."

"Find it in Nevada?"

Old Mojave squinted for a moment.

"That's right. It was in Nevada—in the—no, I can't tell you jist where. Funny I ain't thought of Nevada for a long time."

"Was it a gold mine, Mojave?"

"Free millin', y'betcha. Why, that stuff assayed—ain't it funny how them figures all faded out on me?"

"You had it located?"

"Located? I dunno. Mebbe not."

Mojave got to his feet, snapped his fingers to the dog, and they went down to the corral together. Oklahoma shook his head sadly.

"It must be hell to not remember," he said.

"Yeah; but in some cases it's hell to remember."

"Mebbe it is, Hashknife. Look at that bullet scar across his face. An' I've seen a bullet scar on his right shoulder. Mebbe old Mojave was a fighter in his time."

"I kinda suspect he was." Hashknife nodded.

"Velly nice noodle," informed Suey Ong, and they filed into the dining room.

CHAPTER IX

BAIT FOR RED BRANT

BUCK PEARSON had said nothing to Lorna for quite awhile following the inquest. He realized that she had tried to offer some testimony that might have pointed a finger of suspicion at him; and Buck was wondering just what to do about her. Finally he went to her.

"Well, you kinda upset things around here," he said. "Of course, you didn't

know the feelin' between Red Brant an' my outfit; so you had a good excuse. But that's all past, now. Red will get a short run an' a hard drop—an' Pima Valley will be a decent place to live in."

Lorna got to her feet, a determined expression on her face.

"I believe I have had all I want of Pima Valley," she said firmly. "You will please have one of the men take me to Gila Springs today. It will only require a few moments for me to pack my things."

Buck laughed at her and shook his head.

"No, I don't reckon I will; and I'll tell you why. In this country, when we angle for big fish we use the proper bait."

"What do you mean?"

"Red Brant is big fish now—an' you're the bait."

"I—I do not quite understand what you mean."

"Oh, yeah, you do. You ain't dumb, Lorna. Red is stuck on you, an' he'll come back. An' when he does come back, we'll git him. See what I mean?"

"He will not come back here."

"Well, me an' the sheriff think he will; an' we're goin' to keep you here until we get him or know he's pulled out completely."

"But you can't keep me here against my will, surely."

"Think we can't? Listen, little lady—I own this country. They all sit up an' bark when I snap my fingers. You can't get to town, unless me or my men take you. It's too far to walk. Be sensible. Stay here until Red Brant is behind the bars an' I'll take you to the train myself."

Lorna looked him over, her face expressing the disgust she felt for him. She walked back to her room and locked the door behind her. Buck laughed and helped himself to a drink from his private bottle, after which he went out to the stable and had a talk with Buzz Brown, whom he had decided to appoint foreman in Tex Thorne's place.

"Get Terrill, Ariza an' Wells," ordered Buck. "Five of us ought to be enough. We'll drop down to the Bar M, lay low until after dark an' see if we can't land Mr. Brant."

"You think he's hidin' at his own place, Buck?"

"It's a good bet. We'll get placed before dark."

Lorna saw the five men ride away from the ranch, but she did not know where they were going. They did not follow the road, but headed nearly straight south across the hills. Lorna realized that she was virtually a prisoner at the HP ranch. Buck would see that she did not get to town.

"Using me to help them catch Red Brant," she told herself indignantly. "The last thing I would ever willingly do."

She sat down on a bench in the patio, the same bench that she and Red had used. It was nearly time for supper, and she could hear Dopey Dowling in the big kitchen, rattling pans and dishes. A dog began barking at some one, and Lorna walked down to the big gate.

It was Faro Fleming and Fanny De Lacey in a buggy. Lorna had never seen either of them, but Dopey had told her about a woman whom Buck would probably marry. Lorna stepped behind some climbing vines as they came through the patio and, as they went into the house without the formality of knocking, she was struck with a sudden idea.

Lorna could drive a buggy horse. Here was a way to get away from the ranch. Disregarding the fact that she wore no hat, that her baggage was all in the ranch-house, she ran out to the horse, swiftly untied it and climbed into the buggy. Her quick movements startled the horse. It whirled as short as possible, nearly upsetting the buggy, and they went careening down through the big gate, nearly knocking a wheel off against a post. They swept down the road toward Gila Springs, with the horse running at top speed.

Dopey heard the rattle of wheels, the thudding of hoofs, and ran to the kitchen door in time to see the rig disappear. Then he turned to see Faro and Fanny

in the doorway to the dining room.

"Oh!" grunted Dopey. "I wondered whose rig that was. Why don'tcha tie your horse tight? Might save you a walk back to town."

Faro ran past him and looked out. There was no sign of the horse, except a lingering cloud of dust down along the road. Faro swore softly and turned to Dopey.

"Where is Buck?"

"*Vamoso*," said Dopey. "Him an' some of the boys rode away awhile ago, an' they didn't say where they was goin', except that they won't be back for supper."

Faro turned back to his sister.

"Well, we had the ride for nothing, Fan. I'll be lucky if I don't have a smashed buggy to pay for. Damn it, I tied that horse tight enough. Dopey, will you hitch me up a horse?"

"You're out of luck, Flemin'. We ain't got a buggy horse on the place. Ain't got no ridin' horses either—not caught up. They turned the *remuda* out two hours ago."

"At least, you can feed us." Fanny smiled.

"Shore can, ma'am. You jist go in an' set down, an' I'll have the grub ready in thirty minutes."

"What about that girl?" said Faro softly. "We'd like to meet her."

"Buck's daughter?"

"Is that true?" asked Fanny anxiously.

"Search me. Buck don't talk about her, an' she don't say much. Mebbe she'll talk to you, ma'am. She's prob'ly out in the patio."

But they did not find her, and after a search of the place they came back just as Dopey was putting the food on the table.

"That's funny," said Dopey as he went outside, where he hammered the supper call on the old steel triangle.

Lorna did not come. Dopey went to her room, but she was not there. He went back to the dining room and looked at the other two.

"Sa-a-ay!" he blurted. "I'll betcha four bits that your horse didn't run away a-tall."

"You mean—that girl took it?" asked Faro.

"Looks thataway."

"But why would she steal that horse?" asked Faro. "Was there any reason for that?"

Dopey rubbed his stubbled chin thoughtfully.

"Well, I dunno. Buck an' her had words this afternoon, an' I heard him say somethin' about Red Brant bein' a fish an' her the bait; an' he said she'd have to stay here until Red was caught."

Fanny De Lacey laughed.

"Buck must be real fatherly toward her."

"It's puzzlin' me, ma'am," said Dopey. "None of us *sabe* it. Buck ain't no hand to explain things to us. I done asked him somethin' about it, an' he told me to mind my own damn business. Somethin' is botherin' Buck. Mebbe it's this daughter proposition; I dunno. Anyway, you're here until you can rustle another rig; so you might as well eat."

"They tell me she is pretty," said Fanny.

"Prettiest girl I ever seen," declared Dopey. "Looks honest too. Of course, you never can tell by the label."

"Is she in love with Red Brant?" asked Faro.

Dopey felt of his bandaged head and grinned sourly.

"What happened to your head?" asked Faro as Dopey headed for the kitchen.

"Misplaced confidence," he said.

"How was that?"

"Oh, I jist made the mistake of supposin' that a man in love wouldn't have a six-shooter in his right hand . . . You want canned cow in your java?"

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy thoroughly enjoyed Suey Ong's cooking. He was much better than the average ranch cook, and the two hungry cowboys ate noodles and chicken until they were hardly able to move away from the table. Okla-

homa had stabled and fed their horses.

"Ain't it funny how things happen?" observed Oklahoma, after their cigarets were lighted. "We go along without anythin' happenin', month after month, until you never figure that anythin' is goin' to happen; an' all to once somethin' breaks. Ordinarily the stealin' of that ten thousand dollars would keep everybody awake nights. But along comes the killin' of Mica Miller to take our minds off the money.

"An' then comes the murder of that feller Marshall in Pima City. Now we've got the killin' of Tex Thorne to account for. Three murders an' a big robbery, all in a few days. I tell you, things are lookin' up around here, Hashknife."

"That's right," agreed Hashknife. "Anyway, they can't blame Red Brant for the killin' of Marshall."

"No, they can't hardly do that. I don't see how they can hang anythin' on Red for the death of Mica Miller, either."

"How about Tex Thorne?" asked Hashknife.

Oklahoma sighed deeply.

"Red never killed Tex, but he'll have a hell of a time provin' he didn't. That girl done give him away—I mean she told Buck he was there in that patio. Red didn't like Tex. Fact of the matter, he didn't like any of the HP outfit. But Red ain't the kind to murder a man."

"Mebbe it was an even break," suggested Sleepy.

"Nope. Red said he didn't kill him."

"Does Red know who did?"

"He said he'd swear Buck Pearson killed Tex."

"But Red is hidin' out."

"Shore he is. An' why not? He wouldn't have no more chance than a wax cat in hell. Who'd believe that Buck killed Tex? Nobody. They'd laugh at Red an' hang him higher'n hell. Why, Tex was Buck's right hand man. Everybody said that Tex was closer to Buck than any other man—an' he was. But I believe Red. Hell, if he killed Tex, he's jist reckless enough to advertise it. You mebbe can make Red take to the hills, but you can't scare him."

It was after dark when Hashknife and Sleepy told the boys goodby and went down to saddle their horses. Hashknife led his horse to the doorway of the stable, but stopped short. Sleepy was saddling by the weak light of a smoky lantern, farther back in the stable.

A group of horsemen had ridden in close to the stable and dismounted. They were tying their horses to the corral fence. Hashknife stepped back, watching from the edge of the doorway. Sleepy saw him and came softly to the door.

It was Buck Pearson and his four men. They scattered silently and proceeded to surround the house.

"I'll betcha they think Red's in the house," whispered Sleepy. "Is it the sheriff's posse, do you think?"

"I don't believe it, Sleepy. More likely Buck Pearson an' his gang."

"Takin' the law in his on hands, eh?"

"Looks thataway. They're movin' in close now. I hope Oklahomy don't get foolish an' start a war."

"Mebbe we better go up there an' lend a hand, pardner."

"Not yet. You stay here an' I'll see what I can find out."

Oklahoma had opened the door, and they saw two of the men cover him with their guns as they entered the house. The others moved in, and some went through the kitchen. Hashknife sneaked up to the side of the house, placing himself in a dangerous position, and watched through a small window. Buck's men had disarmed old Oklahoma, who was arguing warmly with them. Suey Ong was lined up against the wall with old Mojave.

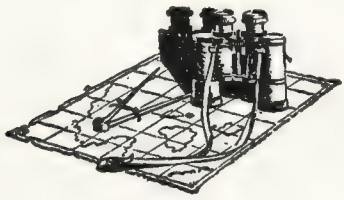
Buck was talking angrily with Oklahoma, and Hashknife saw him draw back his fist and knock the old cowboy flat on his back.

"That evens us up, you dirty old sidewinder," said Buck. "Buzz, you watch this bunch, while the rest of us take this shack apart and see if we can't find what we came to get."

TO BE CONCLUDED

Captain Sir Richard F. Burton

By FAIRFAX DOWNEY



A Glimpse into the Amazing Career of this Great English Adventurer

A CHANGELING, some are half willing to believe, was left in a cradle in Hertfordshire one night in 1821. An English babe was whisked away and in his place was laid an Arab child worthy to have lived in the great days of the caliphates.

Such by supernatural explanation for want of a better was that extraordinary mortal, Richard Francis Burton, whom authorities call one of the greatest explorers the world ever has known, ranking him with Marco Polo, Arminius Vambery, Charles Doughty, and Lawrence of Arabia. Master of the languages, the lore and disguises of the Orient, Burton made a famous pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina; he was the first white man to penetrate to forbidden Harar in East Africa, and he led the expedition which discovered the sources of the Nile. The routes which he charted in East Africa and Arabia in the middle of the last century were quoted as still the best in the World War handbooks. Colonel Lawrence declared that Burton's description of points in his perilous journey to Mecca was correct in every detail.

To these achievements and others, Burton added his celebrated translation of the "Arabian Nights," made as one to the manner born. There is no record of any Arab strain in his blood, yet his first visit to Arabia aroused in him the mysterious feeling that he had lived there in the distant past. His whole career seems a tale out of the "Thousand Nights and a Night." Burton not only translated them, but was translated into them.

In him was born again the poor fisherman who cast his net and caught a jar; all his life Burton was unbottling troublesome genii and causing commotions. He was at once Harun al-Rashid, the adventurous masker, and his Wazir Ja'afar, who starved at the Barmecide's airy feast. He was another Aladdin who never learned till late to rub his wonderful lamp for gold. He was the Prince of the Magic Carpet and Sindbad the Sailor, fated to perform strange exploits in the strange places of the earth.

Life had early in store for him one of those queer twists which the story tellers of the "Nights" loved. Destiny marked the boy with all the physical characteristics of an Arab save two. His face was of an Arabic cast, his complexion dark, his hands and feet small; but his eyes were of the blue of the North, and the ensemble was topped off by a shock of flaming hair. These last two features—which in later years would have hampered his disguises—made his present fortune.

His wealthy grandfather's heart had been set on a blue eyed, red headed boy and when Lieutenant-Colonel and Mrs. Burton provided the same, the old squire was eager to make Richard Francis his sole heir. But the boy's mother was unwilling to see a half brother of hers deprived even for her own son and for three years she blocked her father's intentions. At last the squire took matters in his own hands, drove to his lawyer's to change the will in his grandson's favor—and dropped dead on the threshold of the office.

No sooner had Burton's bright prospects of riches dimmed than his eyes and hair began to follow suit sympathetically. As he grew older, both darkened until they became black, as jet-black as an Arab's. Destiny had exchanged an English fox hunter for an Orientalist.

A boyhood spent in France and Italy with the family, trying one resort after another for his parents' health, planted in Burton the seeds of the wanderlust. Oxford could not hold for long the youth who was to make himself one of England's greatest scholars. Colonel Burton struggled in vain to make a clergyman of a son determined to be a soldier. The lad won, and in 1842 sailed for Bombay as an ensign in the East India Company's army. Sindbad was embarked for the Sind.

During his six years in India he qualified with incredible rapidity in Hindustani, Gujarati, Marathi, Sindhi, Punjabi, and Persian. He studied also Sanskrit, Pushtu, and Arabic, gateway to the magic land of the "Arabian Nights". He used to say that when he set out to acquire a language he learned the swear words first, and after that the rest was easy.

Another task he imposed upon himself was overcoming his horror of serpents. He realized this antipathy was a handicap to an officer serving in India, so the indomitable fellow proceeded to take lessons from snake charmers. Soon he was coddling cobras with the best of them. When the regiment changed station to Karachi in the Sind, Burton and other larking subalterns would visit a pond of sacred crocodiles. Diverting the keeper with a bottle of cognac, the officers and their terriers set about some sacrilegious water sports. Burton baited a hook with a fowl and landed a huge saurian. Muzzling it with a rope, he gaily rode it around the shore. Just before it reached the pond, he dismounted and dodged a murderous blow from its tail.

It was in India that he became a master of disguise. Skin henna stained, bearded, perfect in dress, language and manner, Burton could venture anywhere without detection. By order of his commanding general, he investigated and reported on native dens of vice. And though he risked his life repeatedly, his disguise was never pierced.

BUT HIS GREATEST masquerade was his pilgrimage to Medina and Mecca, a feat which he was the first non-renegade Englishman to perform in Moslem habit and of his own free will. He assumed his disguise in London in April, 1853, and never stepped out of it until he was safely back in Egypt six months later. Detection would have cost him his life.

His violent adventures began on a pilgrim ship sailing from Suez. Burton and native companions, who were unaware that he was anything but the Afghan he pretended to be, were among the ninety-seven passengers jammed into space cramped for sixty.

Hardly was the *sambuk* under way when a Turk on the lower deck was disabled by the daggers of Maghrabis. Burton and his companions from the upper deck looked down into the burning stares of those fierce men of northwestern Africa, most quarrelsome and vicious of pilgrims, and knew they must fight to hold their place. As the brown press swayed toward the quarterdeck, the *rais*, or captain, prudently stepped aside. Ashen staves, greased and thick as a man's wrist, were seized by Burton and his comrades.

"Defend yourselves if you don't wish to be the meat of the Maghrabis!" shouted Saad, a huge black slave.

Up against the deck four feet above them swarmed the Maghrabis like angry hornets. Daggers flashed and palm sticks swung aloft to shouts of "*Allah akbar!*" The staves of the defenders thudded down on hard skulls.

Burton, chary at first with his blows, felt his blood leap at the call of the fray. Down crashed his staff on the heads of the assailants, as he joined his battle cry to the others.

"I am Abdullah, the son of Joseph!" he yelled. Colonel Joseph Netterville Burton would have been proud to acknowledge it.

On came the Maghrabis without flinching, storming the deck with desperate valor—as persistent as the sorcerer of their tribe who was so nearly the death of Aladdin. Perhaps Burton wished for Aladdin's lamp. He laid hands on the nearest substitute, a large earthen jar on the edge of the deck. With a desperate heave he rolled the one hundred-pound pot down on to the mass. Shrill shrieks rose as it shattered on them and drenched them. The tide of the Maghrabis rolled back and they sued for peace. If the men on the quarter deck could fight like that, they could keep the place of command.

Completing a scorching voyage, the pilgrims landed at Yambu and began their desert journey by camelback. After two encounters with Bedouin raiders, they won through to Medina. Burton and his servants, Mohammed and Nur, were among those who joined the Damascus caravan for the march across the burning desert to Mecca.

As the caravan marched on, spirits fell on its approach to a dry stream channel enclosed by rocky walls. A wisp of smoke and a ringing detonation heralded the downing of piety by the hope of plunder in the fierce hearts of Bedouin brigands. A dromedary in front of Burton crumpled with a bullet in its heart. Men and animals jammed solidly in the narrow passage. Bullets thudded into the mass. Through the frightful confusion pushed the guards, shouting useless orders. Above the din of the fusillade soared the screams of the women and children. The pasha in command spread his carpet at the foot of the left precipice, puffed on his pipe and vainly debated the proper procedure with his officers.

Burton waited with his pistols primed, as the panic swirled about him. He could not move to reach the fighting, so he did what he could. In a loud voice, he called for his supper!

The group about him turned from terror to astonishment.

"Oh, sir!" piped the boy Mohammed.

"By Allah, he eats!" others grunted.

"Are those Afghan manners?" asked a man of spirit in the litter behind, grinning.

"Yes," Burton answered. "In my country we always dine before an attack of robbers, since those gentry are in the habit of sending men to bed supperless."

The man laughed; others goggled, aghast. Burton feared he had offended by his bravado; on the contrary he had made a reputation and helped calm a rout. And now a brave Arab chieftain led a band of undismayed Wahhabis in a charge up the heights, while another group covered it with fire. The caravan wrested itself free from the Bedouins' clutch.

Bodies of men and beasts in undetermined numbers strewed the floor of the deadly pass, toll of this Mohammedan

pilgrims' progress. Slain or wounded, they were left to the hovering raiders along with the booty of baggage and boxes which had drawn the murderous attack. The survivors hastened on. A march of a day and a night and Mecca glowed before their eyes, lighted by the "chandelier of the Southern Cross" and hallowed by flashes of sheet lightning. With sobs and shouts of joy, the caravan entered through the Bab El Salam, or Gate of Security.

Burton's life was in the utmost peril when he visited the shrine of the Kaabah and the other holy places of Mecca. A slight mistake in character or ceremonial might have betrayed him as an infidel and fanatics would have torn him limb from limb. Yet the indomitable man dared linger to make secret measurements and minute observations. Only when he had seen all he wanted, did he make his way to Jedda on the coast.

Safe on the deck of a steamer with Nur, his servant, Burton said farewell to the boy Mohammed, who was remaining in Arabia. With one last impudently knowing look, that youth received his pay and presents and departed. Nur imparted a confidence he just had received from the young Meccan, only sure when it was too late.

"Now I understand," Mohammed had told him. "Your master is a sahib from India. He hath laughed in our beards!"

BURTON'S next great exploit was an exploration of the hinterland of the port of Berberah, Somaliland. Backed by the Royal Geographical Society, he proposed penetrating to the forbidden African city of Harar where no white man ever had set foot.

He organized an expedition including three fellow officers of the Indian army, but left them to establish his base while he ventured alone on the final desperate dash with only a small native escort. His perserverance and his knowledge of natives brought him through to his objective.

Before his eyes reared hill crowning Harar, celebrated for sanctity, erudition, and fanaticism, darkly venerable with a history of three centuries of murder and sudden death. Straggling tombs and groves of bananas, citrons, limes, and luxuriant coffee bushes shared the slopes.

Burton and two of his escort waited beneath the walls manned by hostile, taunting spearmen and archers. At length a loud and angry voice bade them enter. Burton obeyed. The first Englishman crossed the threshold of the Secret City.

They ordered him and his men off their steeds and sought to rush them across a courtyard. Burton disregarded them loftily and stalked with leisurely step to the entrance of the palace. He stepped from the sunlight into a vast, shadowy hall, its walls hung with rusty fetters and bright matchlocks. At the far end waited a figure on a throne. One look at the avenue of approach and the explorer's native companions blanched.

Silent, motionless as statues, a gauntlet of Galla warriors formed a bristling lane from the doorway to the dais. Bushy mops of hair crowned savage black visages from which stared fierce eyes with a fixed glare.

Zinc rings shone dully on muscular black arms and each right hand gripped a spear, gleaming wicked blade aloft.

"Peace be upon you!" the Englishman shouted.

Gripping the butt of a revolver hidden in his belt, he strolled through the deadly avenue.

From his throne, the Amir of Harar, Ahmand bin Sultan Abibaki, a small yellowish man in crimson cloth and snowy fur, answered the greeting. His court watched grimly while two chamberlains seized Burton's arms and bowed him over the amir's extended hand. Though the Englishman refused to kiss it—he reserved that ceremony for women's hands—the amir directed him to seat himself and explain his business.

Now was the crisis. Burton announced that he was an Englishman come

from Aden to see the light of his Highness's countenance and express the hope that the friendship between the kingdoms of Harar and England might endure.

"Hard as the heart of Harar," ran a native proverb that could not be forgotten in that breathless moment of suspense. Burton waited with outward stoicism, but he knew that death was hovering over him.

Harar's traditional hatred of a foreigner made the air heavy with menace. The throng of relatives and courtiers about the throne waited in hushed expectancy. The fuses of the matchlock men who guarded his Majesty even at his prayers burned in readiness. At his back, Burton felt the presence of the wild Galla bodyguard, still leashed at rigid attention. One word and those spears, with blades broad as shovels, would poise and plunge. The six shots of the revolver in his waistband—if he lived long enough to fire them—would be no more than a futile gesture.

He watched the yellow face under the royal turban for his fate. Slowly the suspicious, compressed lips curved into a smile. A bony, talon-like hand was extended in dismissal, like a stay of execution to men condemned. Burton and his policemen strode forth from the audience.

The forbidden city had been penetrated with impunity. Others would follow in the path thus opened. But as the pioneer lingered to make his observations, he began to wonder whether he would be allowed to leave that hostile place except as a corpse.

"You enter by your own will; you leave by another's," ran an ominous African proverb.

By happy chance, the wazir of the court was suffering from chronic bronchitis, and Burton procured him relief by burning brown paper matches steeped in saltpeter under his nose. The powerful minister was grateful. His favor secured the Englishman's safe departure from Harar.

Thirst and hunger assailed Burton and his men on the long ride of two hundred and forty miles in five days back to Berberah. Tribesmen eager for booty shrank out of the way of these men savage from suffering. At last the bay spread before them. Xenophon and his Ten Thousand hailed the sea no more joyously.

Burton's three lieutenants, Herne, Speke, and Stroyan, were awaiting him at the appointed place.

"A glad welcome, a dish of rice, and a glass of strong waters made amends for past privations and fatigue."

Too weary to hear much that night, the leader dropped into a sleep of exhaustion while Berberah buzzed incredulously with the news of his feat.

He was up at sunrise, his tremendous, restless energy busy with new and greater plans. What he had achieved was not enough for him. He would march to Harar again and lead his comrades onward to the very headwaters of the Nile. With his Somal policemen, whose tribal enemies were thick in Berberah, he sailed for Aden in a native vessel to recruit a new party. But the authorities could not or would not spare him another detachment of police. He had done too much, he suspected, by daring to make Berberah a rival port. However, he took what he could get: a nondescript, untrained, undependable body of forty-two men, Egyptians, Arabs and Nubians. A British gunboat conveyed them back to Berberah.

That town was bustling with the confusion of the closing of the great slave fair which had drawn the wild tribesmen from the hills. Soon the crowds that filled it drained away. The exodus was followed by a series of alarming incidents, the disappearance of safeguards upon which Burton had counted.

First the departing fleet of native craft followed by the gunboat, ordered to relieve another on station, stripped the harbor. The expedition which might have gone forward under the comfortable auspices of that vessel's guns was waiting for a mail bringing needed instruments. Next, the *abbans* of the English party gained permission to leave as the rain of the mon-

soon poured down. Sons remaining to represent these protectors lacked the authority of their sires. And in the town lurked a few strange natives with the look of spies.

BY THE NIGHT of April 18th, 1855, Burton's small force was in almost undisputed possession of the vicinity, encamped on a rocky ridge. A native ship put into the deserted harbor with men anxious to join the caravan. She would have sailed at once, but she anchored for the night when Burton kindly and luckily sent dinner aboard for the captain and the crew.

At sunset guards fired over the heads of three horsemen believed to be the forerunners of a raid. The strangers gave a plausible explanation; yet Burton sharply ordered the guards to shoot to kill next time. He and the lieutenants inspected the sentries over the line of tents where he and Herne occupied one pitched in the center, with Speke on the left and Stroyan on the right. They turned in without serious apprehensions. Nothing but friendliness had been shown them, and for thirty years no Englishman in Berberah had been molested. These facts outweighed the forebodings events had aroused.

It was the dread hour between two and three o'clock on the morning of April 19th that a Balyuz cried out that the enemy was upon them. Burton started up to hear a rush of men like the roar of a stormy wind. Calling for his saber, he leaped to his feet.

Yellow flashes stabbed into the night as the sentries opened fire. Through the curtain of blackness that closed down came the sounds of hundreds of trampling feet and the squeals and struggles of animals stampeded on the picket line. Burton, striving to pierce the darkness, dispatched Lieutenant Herne to ascertain the force of the foray. Herne gripped his Colt, ran to the rear and left of the camp where the tumult was loudest. There the guard was fleeing in dismay before the assailing Somali. Twice the lieutenant fired into them, then turned in retreat. He tripped over a tent rope. Prostrate, he stared up at a Somal warrior poised over him with upraised club. Herne shot for his life, dropped the savage, scrambled to his feet, dashed for Burton's tent. He reported the foe in force.

Burton's shouts to Stroyan and Speke to arm had brought no answer. Equally vain were his attempts to rally the guard, scattered in terrified rout. As he stood in the door of his tent, saber in hand, Speke, battered by war clubs, reached his side. No sign of Stroyan. They would never see him alive again.

Herne on his right, Speke at his left, Burton faced the enemy. Three Englishmen against three hundred and fifty Somali!

Like a black sea engulfing a tiny island, the massing circle of savages closed in around the tent. Javelins hurled by unseen hands whirred past. Heavy daggers flung under the raised bottom of the tent thudded into the ground beside the legs of the white men.

Cut and parry, Burton's saber flashed before him. The lieutenants who knelt under its sweep at his sides with flaming revolvers made every shot count. But the chambers of the two weapons soon were emptied. Herne, vainly searching the tent for more ammunition, yelled that a man was breaking through the rear.

There could be no thought of surrender to ferocious warriors, wild to soak their ostrich crests in the gore of their enemies —savages ready to slay even a pregnant woman in the hope that the unborn child might be a male victim of their prowess. The Englishmen must fight their way out or die.

The tent was about to collapse under a rain of war clubs. Burton knew that another minute would see them entangled in its folds, helpless targets of scores of spears. He gave the word to charge. At the head of his comrades, he pushed out into the midst of the yelping mob gathered for the kill. Clubbing their revolvers, Herne and Speke followed.

Through a knot of twenty men immediately in front of him Burton cut a bloody swath. Bearing the brunt, swallowed in the night clamorous with the clashing of steel and the tumult of war cries, he fought his way on.

Hard pressed in the chaos of those minutes when, Speke and Herne vanished, he found himself alone in the center of the foe, he could not know what blows he dealt. It was the inspired attack of a master swordsman in an epic battle. His saber cut right and left, biting into brawny arms perilous with leveled javelins. Its unexpected point lunged into throats before clubs could crash down.

A prone form caught his eye. Perhaps it was Stroyan. Burton sabered his way toward the body. Before he could reach it, he felt a man shoving against his back. He wheeled and raised his blade. A well known voice cried out in alarm. It was the faithful Balyuz pushing him out of the crush. In that second's hesitation when Burton halted his blow, a Somal spearman stepped in and thrust.

Burton staggered back with a javelin transfixing his jaw. The spearman leaped away and fled from the avenging saber. Faint with pain Burton managed to order the Balyuz to bring the native craft in the harbor close into shore as a place of refuge. Still with the javelin through his face, he reeled about still trying to rally his men. An armed party from the ship found him crumpled on the ground at the head of the creek which he had reached with his last strength. They carried him, weak from loss of blood, aboard the ship to safety.

In the morning the survivors were assembled on the craft. Herne was bruised but miraculously unwounded. Speke had made an even more wonderful escape. He had been captured and clubbed and stabbed as he lay bound. One merciful native loosened the ropes and gave him water, but he was succeeded by a murderous fellow who called on the white man to confess himself a Moslem or die. Speke bravely proclaimed himself a Christian, worked loose his hands and parried the spear stabs at his heart. A rain of blows increased his wounds to eleven. Though both thighs were pierced through, the officer struggled to his feet and tottered away, dodging the missiles hurled after him. Three miles his valiant will carried him before he fortunately fell in with a rescue party from the ship.

In the plundered camp they found the mutilated corpse of poor Lieutenant Stroyan, fatal gashes in head, heart, and abdomen. Apparently he had had little chance to defend himself in the swift onrush of the foe. A warrior of the Somali wore proudly an ostrich plume dipped in the life's blood of the fallen Englishman.

Both Burton and Speke recovered rapidly. Withdrawl of the javelin from Burton's face showed that his palate and four teeth had been destroyed. Africa had left its mark on him for life in deep scars on his cheeks.

But Africa was not done with him. The Dark Continent still held a secret which he was bound to discover—the sources of the Nile. Explorers had sought them for 3,000 years; yet all had worked upstream. Burton's plan was to strike inland from the coast of East Africa. Obtaining backing in 1856, he led an expedition of one hundred and thirty-two natives, with Lieutenant Speke as his second in command, deep into the jungle.

Fevers, mutinies and terrific hardships made the long march a nightmare. Under drenching rains, the greasy earth stank like sulphureted hydrogen. Clouds of mosquitoes and tsetse flies, fiendishly persistent, hovered in the sultry air. Black pismire ants swarmed savagely against the feet of the invaders, biting like red hot pincers. From filthy hovels, inhabitants lean with constant drunkenness and rotten with ulcers, stared dully out at the passing column.

The dread disease of smallpox met them on the road, a large down caravan in its grip, its victims already numbering fifty. Burton witnessed a terrible spectacle—men staggering, blinded by the plague, women carrying infants as loathsome as themselves. His own men hurried from

the fatal contact, yet some even in that brief encounter had been marked for death. They disappeared into the jungle to die, banned from entering any village, the vulture, the raven and the hyena the end of their agony.

Desertion made further gaps in the ranks. Mutinies of the Beloch matchlock men brought the whole expedition near disaster. By threat or persuasion, Burton quelled them. Once, it is said, sensing that two of the mercenaries had stolen up behind him, he heard them urging each other to strike. Stabbing backward with a dagger, he pierced one of them to the heart.

But at last on an unforgetable day the caravan, breasting screens of lofty spear grass climbed to the crown of a steep and stony hill. Burton scanned the country from the eminence. A bright flash struck his enfeebled eyes.

"What is that streak of light which lies below?" he demanded of his gun bearer.

"I am of opinion," declared the attendant, "that that is *the* water."

It was Lake Tanganyika, the long sought!

Was this great lake the source of the Nile? Had the veil of Isis been parted at last after so many centuries?

Burton's elation rose, unclouded by doubt.

He explored the lake as best he could to establish his belief. But events were to prove him miserably mistaken. On the downtrip he detached Speke to investigate another body of water. This lake was Victoria Nyanza, which was subsequently determined to be the true Nile source.

Speke guessed it to be so, and his declaration began a bitter controversy with his chief. In spite of the fact that only Burton's leadership pulled the expedition through, Speke claimed the credit for the great discovery. He preceded Burton to London and robbed him of all his glory.

The feud smoldered until 1864 when the two men arranged to meet and debate their differences on the public platform. As Burton awaited his antagonist, word came that Speke was dead of an accident in the hunting field. A bullet from his own rifle had pierced his body close to the heart.

MEANWHILE, in 1863, Burton, then British consul at Fernando Po, West Africa, had been dispatched on a mission to Dahomey. He was instructed to attempt to mitigate the fondness of Gelele, black king of that realm, for slave trading and human sacrifice.

The pride of Dahomey was its army of Amazons, a celebrated and fairly celibate corps of 2,500 women warriors as formidable as they were ugly. Soon after Burton's arrival, a royal review was ordered in his honor.

Past the ex-captain of the Indian army filed the battalions of female soldiery, "dressed in long sleeveless waistcoats, petticoats of various colored cottons, secured at the ankles, whilst narrow fillets of ribbon secured their hair and denoted their corps." Beneath the panoply of umbrellas and flags, the She-Mingan led the first brigade. Followed the She-Nens troop and the royal bodyguard, the Fanti, agile and powerful females pantomiming the removal of male heads. There strode the doughty blunderbuss women, large and lusty grenadiers who never flinched when they fired, as the men did. After them followed their ammunition bearers. The ground shook to the tread of the elephant huntresses, bravest of the brave. Sun flashed on the terrifying weapons of sable razor women, veritable walking guillotines. Musketeers, archeresses, scouts and stretcher bearers brought up the rear of the Hamite Hippolitas.

From this redoubtable array men shrank aside, for it was high treason to touch an Amazon even accidentally.

The demise of every monarch of Dahomey was signalized by wholesale slaughter, the "Grand Customs". Gelele, loyal and dutiful son, on mounting the throne had despatched five hundred men and women to serve as his father's spectral court in Deadland. Each year for the Annual Customs filial piety was

called upon to draft more of the quick to attend upon the dead and swell the ghostly band of wives, ministers, musicians, soldiers, and slaves which upheld the prestige of departed majesty. And no event of importance in this world might pass unreported to the next. Burton more than suspected that murder already had been caused by his own arrival. Surely Gelele had not refrained from informing his sire of the honor done him by the visit of an English embassy. To carry that message into the hereafter some poor wretch had been duly charged with it, had downed a bottle of rum to cheer him on his way and then knelt before the headsman. Had the king forgotten some detail of the news, a second messenger, a human postscript, would have followed the path of the first.

Burton was resolved to save as many lives as possible. He pressed for an audience, delayed by the native delight in keeping a white man waiting. But the explorer was wise in African tactics; he held out the bait of the presents.

At last the hour for his royal reception was set and he entered the palace. Surrounded by wives, King Gelele, black as Erebus, sat in state puffing a clay pipe. His six-foot athletic form was simply clad in a white robe with drawers of flowered purple silk. Bracelets adorned his arms, mandarin nails tipped his fingers and his feet were ensconced in scarlet and gold sandals studded with crosses. Wives tenderly mopped the perspiration from his brow or presented the regal, gold plated cuspidor. Others interposed a screen while he downed a copious tot of rum in imperial privacy.

Burton and Gelele bowed. His majesty rose, hitched up his tunic and advanced and shook hands. How, he inquired, was Queen Victoria, her ministry, and all the English, and what presents had they sent him?

The ambassador made his presentation. One after another he tendered the Foreign Office trinkets and always the eyes of the disappointed potentate roved, seeking the gift he had especially requested: horses and a carriage. These the Foreign Office had failed to provide. Gelele frowned. No victoria from Victoria—no gratitude.

Yet Burton knew well how to be impressive and the pleased monarch soon bid him to an evening revel. It was the king's pleasure to dance for his subjects. Hardly had the royal gamboling ceased, than the English envoys heard with dismay that they were expected to perform next.

His white companions watched Burton with anxiety. Would the queen's representative cast dignity to the winds and caper before a throng of black savages?

He would. Aware of the ceremonial nature of dancing in Dahomey and of importance of his response, Burton rose and stepped into the center of the circle.

The light of scores of torches, reflected on masses of black faces, illumined the unique spectacle of Richard Francis Burton doing homage to Terpsichore. To the enthusiastic thumping of drums, he executed a Hindostani *pas seul*. Thunderous applause. An encore of a spirited jig and breakdown. Delighted majesty leaped up, seized Burton's hands and together they tripped it on the light fantastic toe.

After six weeks of persistence, Burton had succeeded in reading his message protesting slave trading and human sacrifice to the king in spite of the opposition of ministers. But Gelele's reverence for his ancestors was too strong to be overcome by diplomatic persuasions. Burton accomplished all he could by the strength of his will and personality. His threat to leave the country if blood were shed in his presence was successful, as was his plea for the lives of a few of the victims.

Beyond that he was helpless. A view of the victim shed showed him the Evil Night of the "Customs" was at hand. Twenty negroes lashed to posts awaited their fate calmly, ready to be led "like black sheep to slaughter". Only criminals and prisoners of war were to die, the ministers gave assurance.

All that night Burton heard the harrowing booming of the death drums. Cym-

bals clanged drowning the cries of the dying. The king himself, came the word, was aiding his executioners in their ghastly work.

Gruesome tokens of the night's butchery met the envoy's eyes next morning. Corpses in white shirts sat stiffly on dwarf stools. Other cadavers hung nude and head down from the crossbars of gallows. Evidently they had been stifled, for no marks of violence showed on the bodies save for mutilation after death in respect to the royal wives. On the ground lay a grisly array of freshly severed heads surrounded by rings of ashes. In the sky above circled the waiting vultures.

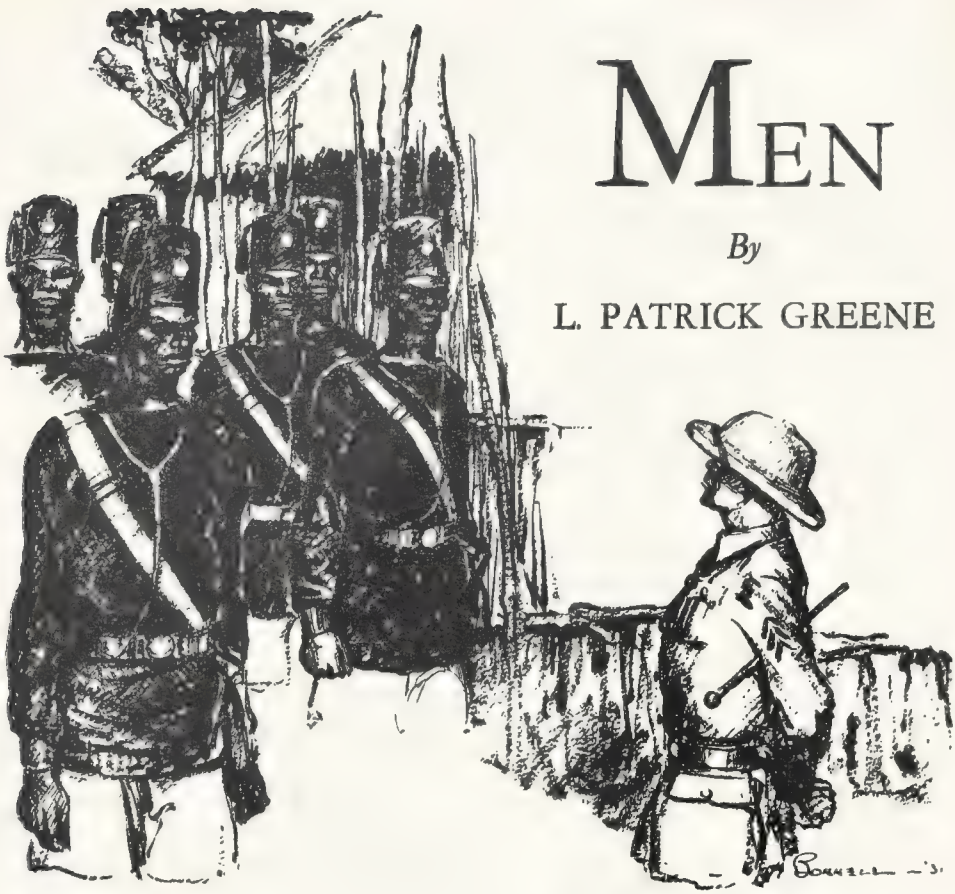
Every man there done to death was matched with a woman victim slaughtered within the palace enclosure, Burton learned. Before the Evil Nights were done, some eighty beings had been added to the train of King Gezo in Deadland.

Burton demanded a final audience with Gelele and boldly spoke his mind concerning the barbarous "Customs" to the consternation of the court. The king, however, chose to take it in good part, telling Burton that he was "a good man but too angry". They shook hands in farewell and the envoy received a cordial invitation to return. He refused to promise. To put one's hand once in a hyena's mouth is an experience. Twice is simply folly.

This brief account of Burton's career as an adventurer must omit the story of his journey to Salt Lake City and his visit with the Mormons in 1860; his later consulates in South America and Syria, and mention of the man's extraordinary personality and his achievements as Orientalist, scientist and author.

With his great translation of the "Arabian Nights" in 1885, he made a fortune, and Queen Victoria rewarded his services at last with a knighthood. He died in 1890 while consul at Trieste.

Now, as in his lifetime, he lacks the fame he merited. For Richard Francis Burton was a genius and among the greatest of history's true adventurers.



MEN

By

L. PATRICK GREENE

SAID England unto Pharaoh, "I must make a man of you,
That will stand upon his feet and play the game:
That will Maxim his oppressor as a Christian ought to do,"
And she sent old Pharaoh Sergeant What'sisname.
It was not a Duke nor Earl, nor yet a Viscount—
It was not a big brass General that came;
But a man in khaki kit who could handle men a bit,
With his bedding labelled Sergeant What'sisname.

Said England unto Pharaoh, "You've had miracles before,
When Aaron struck your rivers into blood;
But if you watch the Sergeant he can show you something more,
He's a charm for making riflemen from mud."
It was neither Hindustani, French, nor Coptics;
It was odds and ends and leavings of the same,
Translated by a stick (which is really half the trick),
And Pharaoh harked to Sergeant What'sisname.

(*Extract from "Pharaoh and the Sergeant" by Rudyard Kipling*)

"THERE they are, Sergeant," said the O. C. of the British South Africa Police. "I'm leaving them absolutely in your hands. Corporal Guffa, here, will translate for you until you have picked up the lingo. You'll find them a splendid crowd of men."

The O. C. absently returned the sergeant's snappy salute and, his head bent with the weight of his thoughts, walked slowly from the parade ground of the native police, crossed the big, dusty square where a squad of white recruits was drill-

ing, entered the officers' mess and dropped with a sigh into an easy chair.

His adjutant eyed him inquiringly and remarked—

"You seem worried, sir?"

"And why not, Cartwright? You've seen the little runt of a blighter they've sent us to whip the Black Watch into shape, haven't you? Well, I've just been introducing him to his men. The Lord only knows what they'll make of him, or he of them."

The adjutant ventured a laugh.

"Aren't you being unduly pessimistic, sir?" he asked. "The sergeant comes to us with a splendid record."

The O. C. snorted.

"It takes a man, Cartwright," he said, "to handle the Matabele. A man they can respect in every way. A man . . ."

The sergeant, a little later, looked at the natives who were huddled together before him in something which burlesqued a military formation. His lips moved.

"Men!" he ejaculated, as if answering the O. C's last words to him. "Grinning apes, more like."

A native who squatted on his haunches nearby, meditatively chewing a long blade of grass, looked up with a friendly grin.

"I speak English, sar," he said. "But the words you say just now, that I do not understand."

The sergeant looked down at the man. He saw a big, broad shouldered native, dressed in khaki shorts and soiled blue serge tunic which was pulled in tightly at the waist by a broad leather belt. The long black tassel of the red fez, which was perched jauntily on his woolly hair, hung down over his low, receding forehead to the base of his squat nose. The buckle of his belt, and the brass letters—B.S.A.N.P—on the fez were covered with verdigris.

The native rose indolently to his feet, stretched himself and yawned noisily. He overtopped the sergeant by head and shoulders. There was a whimsical, half mocking expression on his face as he looked down at the white man.

The sergeant's blue eyes flashed angrily. He had been standing at attention, but now he moved his left foot sharply to the "at-ease" position. He clasped his hands tightly behind his back and fought to control an almost irresistible urge to break his swagger cane—he held it under his arm pit—over the native's back.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Me? My name is Guffa. I am a corporal." Guffa beamed and resumed his former squatting attitude.

The sergeant glared down at him.

"What's the bloomin' use," he muttered. "I've a good mind to chuck it up. Only—I hate being beaten." To the native he said:

"Look here, you bloomin', grinnin' Barbary ape, you. You listen to me. I came out here to teach the rudiments of drill to a lot of half naked heathens who don't know their right hand from their left That's what I've come out here to do—and that's what I'm going to do. Stand up! Yes, you, I mean."

The sergeant glared as the native corporal rose slowly to his feet.

"Take that grass out of your mouth," the sergeant snapped. "Square them shoulders and stand to attention: your thumbs in line with the seam of your trousers, your heels together, your toes pointin' outward."

Corporal Guffa, only dimly comprehending what the sergeant was talking about, assumed something that was like an "attention" position.

"Lumme!" the sergeant groaned. "Shut your mouth. This ain't a fly catchin' parade. And do you call that standin' to attention? Watch me."

His heels clicked, his hands dropped smartly to his sides and he stood there on that hot, sun baked square, as stiff as a ramrod; a personification of the traditions which had produced him.

"There," he said, relaxing. "That is what standing at attention means. Now you stand as I stood. Always, when I give the order, stand like that. Come on, now."

Grinning—this was something he could understand—Corporal Guffa cracked his

naked heels together. He held up his head; he squared his shoulders.

"Better," the sergeant commended. "But you still look like a sack of oats. Close your mouth, I tell you. Keep your eyes fixed in front of you. What do you think you are? A bloomin' matinee idol, oglin' the girls?"

HE STRAIGHTENED the corporal's fez. He placed the man's feet at the proper angle.

"Stop scratching the dust with your toes," he snapped.

He poked the man's belly with his cane, making him draw it in until Corporal Guffa's mighty chest expanded to the point where an undue strain was put upon his tunic buttons. The sergeant tapped each one reflectively with his cane.

"A dirty soldier never made a good soldier, my lad. Remember that," he said. "I got a lot to learn you . . . Steady now!" A note of envy crept into his voice. "Them shoulders and that chest of yours was meant to carry a uniform! Now you remain at attention. I'm going to have a look at these other ugly blighters."

He took up his position a few paces to the left and in advance of the corporal and, for the first time, really examined his command.

Forty pairs of sloe black eyes regarded him critically.

Once again the sergeant was oppressed by the hopelessness of his task. The traditions and heritage of these men were as markedly different from his as the color of their skins was different. They spoke a barbaric, clicking language, utterly foreign to him, and he had to teach them things which they could not understand even if Corporal Guffa could properly interpret his orders. He felt as if he were confronted by a tangled bale of barbed wire which it was his business to unravel. And he could see no place where he could make a start. But a start had to be made.

And with that thought, the sergeant responded to the traditions which had been part of his life for twenty years. His wiry frame stiffened, he shifted his swagger cane to a more jaunty angle. With that gesture he put aside all pre-conceived notions; all thought of failure.

"Corporal Guffa," he said, speaking very slowly. "I am now going to inspect the men. You will come with me."

He walked slowly down the line, halting before each man to inspect him.

He made no comment during that long ordeal—and it was an ordeal. He knew that he was being inspected by the men rather than that he was inspecting them. He only spoke once. And that was to Corporal Guffa who strutted and posed beside him like a conceited pouter pigeon.

"What do you think you are?" he asked in a rasping voice. "A bloomin' ballet dancer? Stand still and conduct yourself like a soldier."

The men were not slow to realize that Guffa had been reprimanded. They made loud, derisive noises; they jeered him. They called him names which, had the sergeant understood them, would have brought mirth to the sergeant's cold gray eyes and, perhaps, blushes to his cheeks.

He noticed that the eyes of each man, after a swift appraisal of his dapper figure, focussed on his cane. He was inordinately proud of that cane, was the sergeant. It had been a parting present to him from the N.C.O's of his old regiment. On a wide gold band near the top was engraved his name, the date and occasion of the presentation. The large round knob, also of gold, was embossed with the regiment's coat-of-arms: a lion rampant.

His inspection completed, he took a stand in front of the men again; and only a swift exhalation of breath indicated his reaction to their appearance and to the filthy condition of their equipment.

The corporal came to him.

"What do we do now, sar?" he asked. "The men want to know. They say for me to tell you that they do not like being looked at as you looked at them."

"No?" the sergeant questioned, his face brightening. "That's funny. The last squad I had was like that. Ah! And every squad afore. Well, listen. Tell

them to go and wash and clean their buttons. I want to see 'em all sparkling like mine, see."

Guffa grinned.

"Yes, sar, Sergeant."

"Tell 'em they're dirty," the sergeant said. "Damned dirty."

He listened, with the air of a man who understood, to the corporal address the men and wondered at the signs of growing resentment which appeared on the men's faces.

The sergeant had called them dirty. The corporal likened them to unclean swine and accused their progenitors of unnameable obscenities. He translated the sergeant's simple statements in a flood of oratory, making the best of this opportunity to answer the insults which had been leveled at him during the inspection.

The sergeant frowned. He had expected some demonstration of dissatisfaction at his orders. But he was not prepared for the storm of angry yells which terminated the corporal's speech. Fists were waved angrily in the air. The forty men moved a menacing step nearer to him.

He looked coldly at the corporal.

"You tell them again to go and wash. And," he added in a threatening voice, "don't you say anything more."

"No, sar, Sergeant," Guffa replied hastily, and endeavored to pass the order on to the men.

But they would not listen. One threw a handful of filth at him. The aim was poor and the sergeant's shoes were splattered. The sergeant's keen eyes rested on the thrower.

"What is the matter with the men, Corporal?" he asked.

"They saying," Guffa exclaimed hastily, "that they did not become soldiers of the Great White Chief to be sent to wash."

THE SERGEANT smiled reminiscently. The men were crowding all about him. He looked at them. He realized then that these men were individuals; as different, the one from the other, as the men in other squads he had drilled. And, save that their color was different, their noses broader, their lips thicker, he recognized old comrades among them.

Meanwhile, emboldened by his silence, the men were becoming more truculent.

"They now saying," Guffa said, shouting to make himself heard above the din, "why do you not talk to them?"

"Tell them," the sergeant began, "that I do not talk until they are quiet. The order is silence—no talking in the ranks. Tell them—"

He stepped back to avoid the pressure of the men in front of him and, in so doing, trod heavily on the naked foot of a powerful native just behind him.

"Tell them—"

"Behind you, sar, Sergeant!" Corporal Guffa shouted.

The sergeant wheeled swiftly.

As he did so, the native on whose foot he had trodden, slashed at him with a long bladed knife. The point of it sliced through the sleeve of the sergeant's tunic and drew blood from his arm. Before the man could strike again the sergeant's heavy cane whizzed through the air and the knob struck the man's knuckles. With a yell of pain the man dropped the knife and rubbed his tingling fingers.

The sergeant took a step forward, looking up into the native's eyes. Once again, purposely, this time, he trod on the native's naked foot. And then, his eyes never shifting, he stooped down and picked up the knife. Straightening himself, he handed the knife to the man and coolly turned his back on him.

He pointed with his cane at the man who had thrown filth.

"What is that man's name, Guffa?" he asked.

"Tomasi, Sergeant, sar."

"Tell him to come here."

Tomasi obeyed the order, stammering explanations, conscious of the laughter of his comrades. He halted when the tip of the sergeant's pointing cane was almost touching his chest. The sergeant pointed to his boots.

"Clean them," he said tersely.

There was no need for the corporal to interpret. The sergeant's tone and gesture were sufficiently eloquent.

Tomasi looked to his comrades for support. But their faces were sober, their lips were closed. They regarded him as a man on trial. Whatever he did now in defiance of the white man must be done alone. If he succeeded, the victory would be entirely his. And if he failed . . .

The sergeant's temper was becoming frayed. The sun was very hot. A thin trickle of blood laced the back of his hand. If he relaxed just a little the parade ground whirled about at a giddy pace and he was surrounded by black, leering faces which had no material form or substance.

"Steady!" he said to himself. And aloud, "Clean them!"

Abjectly, conscious of the others' silence and contempt, Tomasi knelt at the sergeant's feet.

The sergeant gripped his cane tightly. The concentration helped him. It gave bodies and legs to the wraith-like faces about him. He chewed fiercely on his mustache; he scowled. But he could not concentrate sufficiently to give feet to those bodies!

He spoke quickly.

"Tell them, Guffa, to go and wash their bodies and make their buttons clean."

He heard Guffa's voice. He heard the pattering noise of bare feet on the hard parade ground. Vaguely he saw distorted shapes file past. The next moment the hard red earth, which is Africa, arose and smote him.

WHEN he opened his eyes again he found himself on his bed in the sleeping hut of his quarters. Sitting on the ground to his left was the native who had attacked him. He was stropping his knife on the flat, horny sole of his naked foot. He was scowling threateningly.

The sergeant groaned. He would have risen but a heavy hand on his chest kept him flat. He followed the line from that hand to a shoulder, to the face of Corporal Guffa. Guffa was looking toward the foot of the bed. And there the sergeant saw Tomasi. The man—his eyes were fixed on the knife sharpener, and his eyes were dilated with fear—was polishing the sergeant's shoes.

"What the hell?" the sergeant exclaimed.

"It is all right, sar, Sergeant," Corporal Guffa said. "The sun was very hot and you fell. I carried you here. That one—his name is Kawiti—came, too, dragging Tomasi by the hair of his head. He brought Tomasi so that evil one should finish cleaning your boots. Are they now clean enough?"

The sergeant examined his boots critically. They mirrored the contents of the hut.

"Good enough!" he grunted. Then he swore wrathfully. "Get to hell out of here—all of you. Go and wash and clean your buttons. In two hours I will come to see that you have obeyed."

The three men left the hut, talking excitedly together. For a long time after that the sergeant could hear their voices just outside. He went to the door of his hut and saw the corporal and Kawiti squatting on their haunches. Tomasi was standing dejectedly nearby.

"Corporal Guffa!" the sergeant shouted.

The corporal sprang to his feet; as nearly as he could remember, he stood to attention. Kawiti successfully aped his pose.

"I told you to wash and get clean," the sergeant said wrathfully. "That was an order. Obey."

The three men moved off at a run.

For some time after the three men had passed from sight behind the row of huts which lined one side of the parade ground, the sergeant stood at the door of his hut.

Despite the hurt in his arm, despite his aching head, he was conscious of a sense of well being. He was alone, in a strange land, but there was a homeliness about the scene before him that the thatched huts and palms, silhouetted against the electric blue of the sky, could not dispel. He wondered vaguely at his feeling of belonging

until his eyes rested contentedly on the white washed boulders which marked the limits of the parade ground: rows of white washed boulders, in perfect alignment. He had seen them in other camps the wide world over. They made "home" for him.

The brazen notes of a bugle split the air. It was the cook house call. He was on the point of going in search of the sergeants' mess, then he remembered his torn sleeve and his wounded arm and decided that he was not hungry. He did not feel equal to the questions his brother N.C.O's would fire at him. They were not, he thought, sympathetic.

"I got a lot to learn." He sighed and went into his hut. Stripping off his tunic and shirt, he examined the knife wound. The blood had ceased flowing and the wound, he saw with a muttered exclamation of relief, was not very deep. "So that's that," he concluded, dabbing the long red line with an iodine soaked wad of cotton.

As he put on a clean shirt and tunic, a white clad native entered, carrying a tray of food.

"I am sergeants' mess boy, sar," he said with a smirk. "I bring you skoff."

The sergeant sniffed hungrily.

"Good!" he ejaculated and, drawing a chair up to the table, rejoiced in a new found appetite until, conscious that the native still waited, he looked up with a frown.

"Wait outside," he ordered. The native obeyed.

The sergeant frowned, feeling resentful toward the sergeants' mess. They'd got a nerve, they had, taking it for granted he wouldn't eat with them.

Out of that resentment was born a resolution. He was in charge of a lot of niggers, was he? And the only way to boss 'em—so the regimental sergeant-major had told him—was to get to know them; talk their talk, and all that.

Well, he'd do that!

"Hi!" he shouted, recalling the mess servant. And when the native entered, the sergeant said, "Listen, you. I always have my food—skoff, you call it?—here in my hut. See?"

"Yes, sar."

"And I want," the sergeant said slowly, "some one to clean my hut. Some one who can teach me to speak your talk. Understand?"

The native nodded.

"I know a ver' nice *intombi*. I go and get her for you."

Before the sergeant could stop him he had left the hut.

"Oh, hell!" the sergeant exclaimed and phlegmatically turned to his food again.

Presently he looked at his watch and noted that it was time for the promised inspection of his men. He rose to his feet, put on his helmet and absently looked around the hut. There was something else he needed before he was properly dressed.

Footsteps and voices sounded outside the hut. A moment later the mess boy and a woman entered.

The sergeant glanced at them casually. The thing he was looking for was more important to his mind than anything else.

"This, sar," said the mess boy, "is a ver' nice girl." He leered at the sergeant.

The woman said:

"You give me this and I will stay with you. You like me?"

"You—!" the sergeant cursed and, springing forward, snatched from the woman's hand his swagger cane. That was what he had been looking for. He must have dropped it on the parade ground when he fainted and this black cow had picked it up. "Get out, damn you!" he cried, threatening them both with the cane.

They backed precipitately out of the hut and fled as if the devil were after them. But not before the sergeant had seen the grinning leer of familiarity on the mess boy's face give place to one of respect.

"And that's funny," he muttered. "And that's a lesson I've learned. I'm having no truck with their women."

And then, the swagger cane stuck at a jaunty angle under his arm, he walked briskly out to inspect his men.

"BY GAD, sir," the adjutant exclaimed. "The sergeant's done it! I've never seen a better drill. Look at that wheel."

The two officers were watching the sergeant put his men through their paces.

Sharp and incisive the sergeant's commands rang out, and the men went through a series of intricate evolutions. Finally they came to a halt and stood in stolid silence while the sergeant came up to the colonel, saluted and said—

"Shall I dismiss them, sir?"

The O. C. nodded.

"I want to see you afterward, Sergeant," he said. He watched closely as the men trooped off to their quarters. When the sergeant came to him again, he went on, "You've brought them on wonderfully, Sergeant. But—" he hesitated—"are you satisfied?"

"They know their drill, sir," the sergeant replied slowly. "But they ain't soldiers—not what I'd call soldiers. But that ain't to be expected of a bunch of black heathens, sir."

"No?" the colonel smiled as if at some secret knowledge. "Perhaps you're right. How are you getting on with the language?"

"I don't need an interpreter now, sir."

The O. C. nodded commendation.

"I see you've made Kawiti a corporal in place of Guffa. Was that wise? He tried to kill you, didn't he?"

"I didn't think you knew about that, sir." The sergeant flushed.

"News travels fast in barracks, Sergeant. I expected you to report the matter. I'm glad you didn't. But about this promotion—"

"That other business was months ago, sir. I'm thinking the men have forgotten all about it. And Kawiti's a good corporal. He's got a way with men."

"He ought to have," the O. C. commented dryly. "He commanded an *impi* against us during the last rebellion. Well, that's all, Sergeant. Except I'm going to grant you your request. And one other thing: I noticed that No. 5 in the rear rank had an unmended tear in his tunic."

The sergeant saluted and hurried after his men.

The O. C. turned quizzically to his adjutant.

"Well?" he demanded sharply.

"I was thinking, sir," that man stammered. "Well, sir, what I mean, aren't you being rather hard on the sergeant? That was a wonderful drill and you—if you will pardon me—damned it with faint praise."

"I'm ready to agree that the drill was beautiful, but that's not enough. And the sergeant *knows* it's not enough. That's why I'm going to grant his request. You see, Cartwright, he doesn't know his men, yet. And they don't know him. They haven't got on a basis of mutual respect."

"What's this request of his, sir?"

"He wants to take them on patrol, Cartwright. He thinks he'll really get to know them then. So he will. And they'll get to know him. I don't think he's thought of that, though. I'm sending him with them on the Semoukwe patrol."

"Isn't that a bit dangerous, sir? I mean, there's dissatisfaction among the natives down that way. Anything may happen."

The colonel nodded.

"And the sooner we know all about it, the better."

"The sergeant's to be in full charge, sir? You're sending no other white men with him?"

"Not one."

"And if the patrol fails? If the men are disloyal?"

"We shall have found it out at the expense of one white man's life."

"Rather hard on the sergeant, sir."

"You forget the alternative, Cartwright. Think of his glory if things turn out well."

"Glory!" The adjutant dared to snort. "He won't think of glory, sir. I know the breed. He'll only look on it as another job done. And maybe you, sir, will find a speck of dust on his bay leaves."

"Ah!" The colonel smiled. "Maybe I deserved that, Cartwright."

THE SERGEANT nervously fingered his revolver as he listened to the tumult of voices outside his tent.

A month had passed since he had marched at the head of his men from headquarters on this patrol and the difficulties he had had to overcome had been enormous. He had had to curb their looting propensities and make the best use of their desire to show off before the people of the *kraals* they passed on the line of march.

Once the dust of headquarters was shaken off their feet; the men could not see the point of cleaning buttons and arms after a long day's trek. They resented the necessity, even, of having to wear their uniforms.

This phase the sergeant had met by precept and example. No matter how hot the day, his helmet was always worn at a proper angle, his putties rolled meticulously, his tunic collar fastened. No matter how long and arduous the day's march had been, he could always be seen sitting just outside his tent, cleaning his equipment before turning in for the night.

Later, the admiration of the *kraal* people affected the men like a heady wine. At first they took the credit to themselves and each strove to outdo the other. But the people who admired were also quick to criticise, quick to pick out flaws due to self-glorification. And, presently, the men began to experience the labor pains of giving birth to that abstract thing called *esprit de corps*.

At this stage their pomposity, their touchiness regarding what they could, or could not, do, imposed an enormous strain on the sergeant's patience and understanding; he knew how easy it was to spoil a blade at the time of tempering.

This past week they had trekked along the bank of a wide river. In places they had been forced to hack their way through tangled undergrowth; scimitar sharp thorns had torn their clothing and lacerated their flesh. But this they could have borne had they been spared the unfriendly attitude of the natives whose *kraals* were strung along the river banks.

These people had been the last to throw down their arms at the close of the last rebellion. And all the bitterness they felt toward their white overlords was expressed in their behavior toward these men of their own race who had become the dogs of the white man.

At first the sergeant's men had been contemptuous, ignoring the insults. But their resentment grew. They knew their own worth—and they were very human.

They answered, at last, insult with insult. On one occasion, ignoring the sergeant's angry orders, they had fixed bayonets and charged a crowd of jeering men, scattering them like a flock of dog frightened sheep. After that the people had changed their tactics. They now professed to commiserate with the uniformed men.

"Doubtless," they said, "you have been bewitched. You follow a puny weakling. At his command you do all manner of foolish things and expect us to gape in admiration. Yes, you are bewitched."

Finding no answer to this, doubts arose in the minds of the sergeant's men. In order to assert their independence, they became slack and slovenly. They refused to clean their equipment; their drill was a farce. The line between insubordination and open mutiny wore very thin . . .

The sergeant peered out cautiously through a slit in his tent. Some of his men, he could see, were seated on the bank of the river, throwing stones at crocodiles; others, squatting on their haunches, their uniforms discarded and tossed in an untidy pile, were fraternizing with a large group of *kraal* natives, drinking beer and joining in the laughter leveled against their comrades.

The sergeant turned as Kawiti entered the tent.

"Another fool has taken off his uniform," the native said savagely. "And you do nothing."

"I could not stop him," the sergeant said. "I can stop none of them. If they wish to put off the uniform, they will do

so. They are free men. They would be worthless if they were not."

Kawiti looked at the sergeant's revolver.

"Make *that* speak," he said, "and it will silence the voice of those who scoff at us."

"Where is Guffa?" the sergeant asked.

"Regarding him, your order has been obeyed. He is tied—hands and feet—elsewise he would now be driving the deserters into the river. *Wo-wel* Release Guffa. Let the three of us make a stand and those who have deserted will come back to us."

The sergeant shook his head.

"It is an order that there be no bloodshed."

"They think," Kawiti said slowly, "that you talk of peace, and restraint from bloodshed, because you are a coward. And men will not be led by a coward."

"Yet you stay, Kawiti."

"Aye. It comes to me that the game is bigger than the man. I do not understand, but I stay."

The sergeant looked as if a heavy load had been removed from his shoulders. He returned the revolver to the holster which hung from the tent pole.

"Come," he said and, picking up his swagger cane, he led the way out of the tent.

His appearance was greeted with shouts of derisive laughter.

THE SERGEANT looked sharply about him and was astonished at the number of *kraal* natives who had gathered at the camp during the time he had been in the tent. Including the women and children there were, he estimated, over two thousand of them. And others were constantly arriving.

The river bank was the diameter of the semi-circle they formed about the camp. They were perched in the trees, on rocks, on termite heaps. Some dangled their legs over the river bank.

They jeered the sergeant and Kawiti. Their insults prodded deep below the outer shell of self-discipline with which the sergeant had encased himself. His eyes blazed. He chewed his mustache. He stood at the "stand-at-ease" position and his hands closed tightly about his cane. His face reddened.

A group of warriors advanced truculently, boasting in a way which, they hoped, would sting the white man into action and give them an excuse to attack him.

But the sergeant, his temper under splendid control, stood firm.

He heard Guffa's voice berating the deserters and urging those others, who were still wavering on the brink of indecision, to rally to his support.

Glancing swiftly over his shoulder, the sergeant saw that Guffa—somehow he had got free of his bonds—was standing just behind him. Six others were with Guffa. They all carried rifles; the sun shone on their fixed bayonets. But when the *kraal* people began to throw filth at them, the six broke and ran for cover. Guffa, shouting his contempt, moved up and stood at the sergeant's left. He and Kawiti flanked the little white man with their bayonets.

For a fraction of time the sergeant considered the problem which faced him. The affair, he decided, resolved itself into a racial test: white against black.

Again the people misconstrued his silence. The outcry against him grew louder; the air was filled with flying missiles—stones which bruised, filth which stained.

A broad shouldered warrior sprang forward, flourishing a *knobkerry*.

"He'd set off a uniform well," the sergeant thought, as the man feinted to bring his weapon down with a crashing force on the sergeant's head.

With a shrewd lunge, the sergeant got the point of his cane home in the man's belly and the native collapsed—doubled up, winded.

"*Wo-wel* The magic of your stick!" Kawiti exclaimed.

"Stand to attention!" the sergeant

snapped. "Do not speak; do not move again unless an order is given. You, also, Guffa. This is my *indaba*. I handle it in my own way."

He turned to the *kraal* natives; his eyes took the measure of the warriors who were nearest to him. The man he had winded with his cane crawled away behind an ant heap. For a little while his hiccoughs were the only sounds which broke the silence.

"You call yourselves warriors," the sergeant said suddenly. His breaking of the silence was a splendid piece of timing. A moment later and the natives would have broken out again into shouted insults. "You call yourself warriors. But, *wo-we!* Warriors do not fight with words and the throwing of filth. What are you then? Women or apes?"

He laughed at the storm of threats and challenges which answered him.

"Nay, if you all talk at once," he said, "then you do prove yourselves to be no better than dog apes. Is there not one among you who can speak for all? Your headman—where is he?"

"Timali! He is our headman. He is our mouthpiece."

From a group of old graybeards rose Timali, the headman. He was a battle scarred veteran. Age bent his frame. In his eyes blazed hatred and contempt of white men.

"Hell!" the sergeant thought as the old one came toward him. "He's like royalty."

He glanced at Kawiti and Guffa. The two men were standing stiffly at attention. But Kawiti's lips moved, muttering encouragement.

The sergeant drew a deep breath and faced front once again. Timali was only a few paces from him; the warriors massed in silent respect behind their leader. For a few minutes the white man and the headman eyed each other calculatingly. And then Timali sneered:

"You call my warriors dog apes, white man, because they fight you with words and throw filth at you. How else can they deal with the thing you are?"

THE PEOPLE greeted this with laughter. They renewed their shouted insults.

"It is my desire," the sergeant said slowly, "to pay you the courtesy due to your age, to your headmanship and to the honor you have doubtless won in many fights. To the one you were, I still pay that honor. To the one you are —*au-a!* I can only grieve for the one you are!"

"What talk is this?" Timali growled.

"Is it not evident," the sergeant asked smoothly, "that your people no longer respect you? They make a loud noise while you converse with me so that we have to shout to make ourselves heard."

Timali held up his hand. In the silence that followed, he said:

"There's little I want to say to you, or hear you say to me. You doubt my authority over my people—therefore I give you, for a little while, silence. What would you say?"

"Very little," the sergeant replied. "You and your people have treated my men like unclean beasts. Why?"

Timali laughed.

"Because warriors will only follow a warrior—and they follow *you*."

"And I, you would say, am no warrior?"

"You have said it," Timali agreed dryly.

"Doubtless," the sergeant said, "there is a man of your *kraal* worthy to lead my men?"

"The least of my warriors is more worthy than you," Timali said scornfully.

"Your words are loud, Timali," the sergeant said quietly. "But my men are proud. It would not be courteous to ask them to follow the least. Who, then, is your *best* warrior?"

"My son, Jhentsi."

"Let your son stand here beside you," the sergeant said.

Timali ordered his son to stand out from among the warriors.

He stood over six feet; his shoulders were broad; the girth of his chest enormous. But his belly was overlarge; his cheeks were fattened with the heavy meals

of peace. The sergeant appealed to Kawiti.

"Is he worthy of us?"

"At least, he has the appearance of a man," Kawiti replied.

"He has killed a lion single handed," Timali said. "There is no place for fear in his heart."

The sergeant nodded.

"I am satisfied, Timali," he said. "Your son is worthy of the honor I am about to do him."

"*You* do him honor?" Timali scoffed. "What mean you?"

"I mean to test him," the sergeant replied. "He shall measure his strength, his cunning, his courage, against mine."

"You must think we are fools, white man," Timali said, silencing the laughter which had greeted the sergeant's challenge. "We know all about the white man's weapon which can kill from a distance."

"You misjudge me, Timali," the sergeant said. "Look—this shall be my weapon." He took Kawiti's bayoneted rifle, giving that man his cane to hold. "Jhentsi shall have one, too, if he is of a mind to. But, truly, it would be better for him if he uses his own weapons. He would be as helpless as a babe if he went up against me using one of these. Let him try it . . . Catch, Jhentsi."

He threw the weapon to Jhentsi, laughing softly as the man, surprised at its weight, nearly dropped it. Jhentsi tried a few stabbing strokes with it, then returned it to the sergeant.

"It is a child's toy, my father," he said. "And awkward."

"Each workman to his own tools," the sergeant said grimly. "But, because I may not kill from a distance, neither must Jhentsi. He must not throw a spear or *knobkerry*. No weapon must leave his hand. Is it fair?"

Timali shook his head.

"I am no fool, white man," he said. "Because we black ones are divided among ourselves, we must fear the vengeance of our white overlords. For your death, many of my warriors would die."

The sergeant laughed.

"If Jhentsi kills me, what need for other white men to know how I died? There is the river—and crocodiles in the river. You can say that that is the way I died."

Timali eyed him thoughtfully.

"You house a big spirit in a little body," he said. "Maybe I have been mistaken. It shall be as you say, then, white man. Come. Yonder the ground is smooth and firm. Also—" he added with a meaning chuckle—"it is nearer the river."

He led the way to a small, plateau-like clearing, bounded on one side by the river. And there, forming a large ring, massed the *kraal* folk.

The sergeant noticed that a number of his men had resumed their uniforms. Their red fezzes gave a touch of color to a scene that the blue of the sky and the vivid foliage could not relieve from a drab somberness. Bayonets sparkled as the men, carrying their rifles at the slope, grouped themselves about the headman.

"Timali is a cunning fox," Kawiti explained. "But he will try no tricks today."

The sergeant nodded. His eyes were fixed on his gigantic adversary.

JHENTSI was standing in the center of the ring, the sun at his back, testing the balance of a long bladed *assegai*. Some one handed him a large ox hide shield. He slipped his left hand through its leather thongs and crouched behind it. His eyes peered savagely over the top; the point of his *assegai* protruded at the side.

"Blimme!" the sergeant thought. "He's going to be hard to get at. He looks like a bloomin' turtle."

He walked out a few paces toward Jhentsi and then stopped. He stood at the "on guard" position.

"Come on, white man," Jhentsi said. "Come and meet death."

"He has looked on you, Jhentsi," the people laughed, "and knows fear. His feet can not move him."

And Jhentsi said again:

"Come, white man. Come and meet death."

"It is always my way," the sergeant said easily, "to wait for death to come to me. The way is not easy and he often misses the trail. So I live, warrior. Bring death to me, Jhentsi—or are you afraid?"

The taunt had its desired effect. With a roar of rage, Jhentsi leaped up and charged at the sergeant, his right arm upraised, ready to stab as soon as he got witnin range.

"He runs to his death," Kawiti exulted, knowing the deadliness of a forward lunge against an onrushing, guardless foe; knowing, too, the sergeant's expert control of his weapon and the strength of steel that was in the little man's body.

"*Au-al*" he added. "What folly is this? He plays with death."

The sergeant had sidestepped, evading the wild rush and, as Jhentsi blundered by, struck the man with the flat of his hand on his naked hip.

"What?" he exclaimed in tones of mock reproach. "Do you run from me, Jhentsi?"

The big man wheeled and struck.

The sergeant parried the blow with a twisting counter thrust which almost tore the *assegai* from Jhentsi's grasp and, before the native could recover, the sergeant thrust again, at the heart of the shield. The bayonet slicked through the hide and drew blood from Jhentsi's chest.

Craftily the native released his hold on the shield and before the sergeant could remove its hampering bulk from his bayonet, sprang to close quarters, determined to make a swift end.

"Now comes death, white man!" he boasted, and shortened his hold on the haft of his spear. The sergeant laughed.

"Not yet, warrior," he said.

He brought the butt of his rifle up sharply and caught Jhentsi on the point of his chin with such force that the man reeled backward, unbalanced.

"After him. Make an end," Kawiti cried.

Other soldiers took up the cry. Self-assurance was returning to them. Here was proof of the thing they had long admitted in their hearts: That the man they followed was a warrior.

But their shouts of exultation changed to murmurs of amazement and doubt again.

Instead of following up his advantage, the sergeant coolly removed the shield from his bayonet and stood his ground, giving Jhentsi time to recover.

"He toys with him," Kawiti shouted.

And the *kraal* people jeered:

"It is fear that holds him. Now watch."

Again Jhentsi attacked. But this time there was no impetuous rush. He realized that he was opposed by a clever fighter and he brought into play all the tricks of spear play of which he was an undoubted master.

But try as he would he could not break through the white man's guard. No matter where he aimed his thrusts—head, body or thighs—the spear was always checked. The sergeant's weapon was at once a rapier, a bludgeon and a shield of steel and wood.

"And mark this," Kawiti shouted. "The white man has not yet attacked. He only defends. Look you, he laughs; his breath is unhurried. But Jhentsi tires. Watch! The end will soon come."

As if responding to the shouts of his men, the sergeant now attacked. Jhentsi was helpless before his onslaught; his attempts to parry blows were futile.

The bayonet flashed about him. It passed under his arm pits; he felt its cold touch first on one cheek, then on the other; it scored a thin red line across his belly. The butt of the rifle thudded against his ribs and when he bent, gasp; ing for breath, the bayonet point pricked his throat.

He leaped backward. Sweat streamed down his face; his mouth gaped open; his eyes were fixed and staring.

STABBING and slashing desperately, he was forced to give ground. The bayonet continually forced him back. He dodged to the right and to the left, but the respites thus gained were very brief.

He realized at last what had long been apparent to the breathless spectators who had been held silent by the marvel of the white man's skill.

"Make a swift end, white man," he gasped. "Do not play any longer."

All heard his plea; so great was the silence. The people sighed, as if they were very tired.

"Aye!" they cried. "Make a swift end, white man."

Then, marking their utter surrender, they echoed Timali's plea for mercy for his son.

Not that Jhentsi looked for or asked for mercy.

With a last desperate effort he attacked again and the sergeant was forced to re-retreat a little or be forced to kill. And that was not his intention.

Not realizing that Jhentsi's effort was futile, that there was no strength in his blows, that sweat blinded him so that he could not see to direct his blows, the people began to cheer their champion again. Their voices merged into one continuous shout of victory.

And then it looked as if the sergeant's weapon had suddenly turned into a flashing circle of light as he spun it round in his hand like a wheel of steel.

Jhentsi stared at it stupidly. The next moment the circular movement stopped as the butt of the rifle crashed—for the second time since the fight began—on the point of Jhentsi's jaw. The thud of the impact silenced the cries and when Jhentsi toppled slowly to the ground, no one spoke. Timali ran to his son and knelt beside him.

"In a little while the sleep will leave him," the sergeant said quietly. "He is a warrior—and he is my man. I claim him."

And Timali, looking up, nodded understanding. He thanked the white man for sparing his son's life.

The sergeant pivoted slowly; his gray eyes seemed to bore into the people. Suddenly he drew himself erect, standing stiffly at attention.

"Fall in!" he shouted.

His men jumped to answer his command. Every one answered to the roll call.

"Eyes right! Dress!"

Quickly they shuffled into correct alignment.

And then the orders followed in quick succession as the sergeant drilled them as he well knew how. He put them through the Manual of Arms; they marched and counter marched; they made perfect right and left wheels. And there was a snap to their movements, a coordination which made them a perfect whole; they exhibited a spirit which had until now been lacking.

Finally the sergeant put them through their bayonet drill and the people of the *kraals*—they had first watched the evolutions in awed silence—murmured their wondering approval. The murmuring grew louder, merging finally into one long shout of applause.

Even when the drill was over, the sergeant did not relax. But a smile softened the steely grayness of his eyes. That was the only sign he gave that he was conscious of a victory won.

A Story of the Salt Marshes

NOISE IN THE OPEN SPACES

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

WILD JAY HAMMON was sometimes called Silent by his intimates, the reason being the rancher's desire for sounds. The salt grass pasture country is wide, monotonous, quiet. A zephyr of wind drifting by rustles the woody weeds, and along the bayous the water slaps and hisses like the cottonmouth moccasins floating in the eddies. The bellow of the breed Brahma bull mingles with the voices of the alligators, and in the sleety wintertime, far heard across the quivering noiselessness, come the hoarse squawks of blue herons and the shrill pipes of buzzards in the air, or the chanking of their bills at their feeds.

The rancher Hammon had felt so many kinds of quivering calm and voiceless monotony that anything with a shriek or howl drew him fondly. His own whoop boomed across the squashy prairies, audible four miles. Every man on his place, white, gingerbread or black, had a reputation for singing, music, or just yelling. To hear Hammon's trail herd coming in to the shipping pens, steers and cows bellowing, the riders curling their tongues with natural exuberance was just naturally an event in a stranger's life. Timid souls

sometimes thought it foreboded trouble and disaster to hear the Hammon outfit snoring on a night otherwise still and calm.

Hammon especially collected dogs with voices. He had a pack of animals built on the model of jackrabbits, with long ears, large heads and enormous throat capacity. Wild Jay played a French harp, which exasperates dogs more than any other known music, and on Sunday afternoons, with thirty to forty dogs around him, sitting on their haunches with their noses pointed straight up, his ranch was audible seven miles away across the levels. In a long, lonely boyhood Jay had suffered for real noise, and now he made up for his terrible years of dread at the silence, day and night, of his salt grass home. He even bought a calliope, hired a two handed musician and had him play tunes for all hands to dance by, in festivities of which salt grass ranches are fond. Wild Jay was sure he was the champion noise anywhere.

But Wild Jay went down into his pasture one autumnal day and heard a sound that aroused his interest and envious wrath. Two dogs were coming. They were announced by a bellowing and baying long before they arrived. They were on the trail of an anxious and alarmed prairie wolf, which was stepping along trying to look over both shoulders at once, and when the dogs came by Wild Jay he stared.

These two dogs were black and tan. They had ears a foot long. They had great heads, enormous throats, heavy bodies and excellent legs. When they opened their mouths, sound rolled out of them, hit the earth and burst, booming in all directions.

"My gosh!" Wild Jay wailed. "Where'd all that music come from?"

Besides the voices of these two dogs, male and female, the shrill and kioodling outcry emanating from Wild Jay's whole miscellaneous pack was but a faint and insecty sound. He knew it, and so great was his chagrin that both dogs were far on their way, carrying their overwhelming sounds, before the old rancher regretfully realized that it was too late to get a rope on one of them, for further reference.

Wild Jay skinned a steer he found dead over in the next mudhole and went home. Usually he would have sent a Negro down to do such an odd job of skinning, but he figured he needed something to do with his hands while his mind was working. If a man thinks too hard without something to keep his muscles busy, he's sure apt just to be plumb ridiculous making strange motions. So Wild Jay tried to figure out about those two dogs. He'd never seen them. He'd most assuredly never heard them before. His feelings were hurt and his curiosity was aroused. He began to summon his neighbors, over the telephone, trying to learn something about the matter.

Of course, he wasn't going to make himself ridiculous about dogs. Surely not! He inquired about a stray yellow longhorn steer, first. Then he asked if those escaped convicts from the Huntsville country had come any closer. And then he wanted to know if it was so about some hooded riders, inquiring about somebody's activities, over on Rawfork Bayou. And thus he led on to a casual inquiry about a big wolf that was killing baby beef. And finally he mentioned seeing a wolf ahead of two dogs in his Squash Flat pasture, in the afternoon, and the dogs were funny looking, making a loud, remarkable noise. Whose were they, anyhow?

Of course, when Wild Jay asked about the dogs with a loud noise, it was a dead giveaway, for the minute Wild Jay inquired about yelp, whoop, boom, wail or squeal, everybody knew that Wild Jay was in a collecting, not to say envious and avaricious, mood.

However, it pleased Wild Jay's fancy to make himself believe nobody knew he was the original gatherer of loud sounds from Trinity River around to Brownsville, Texas. There was one bull that Wild Jay rode nine hundred miles to get, just on the strength of the animal's deep chested roaring bellow; and if sound is ever an investment, Wild Jay made one that time. They just called that creature

the Big Noise and let him go at that. And among his progeny were other noises that would have disturbed the peace of any other land, but where pastures are thirty-five thousand acres on the average, and million-acre ones are not unknown, Wild Jay could but be regarded as a public benefactor, in view of his breaking of the lonely silences of the wide marshy places.

Some time elapsed before Wild Jay learned that the two trailers were Hank Hubert's. Hubert was that Yankee of the Handsaw brand. Hubert was, naturally, a swapper, and he had swapped an old blue automobile for three mules, and one mule for ten steers, and so on till now he had seven thousand acres of pasture land, some leases, some mules, steers, and outfit, and sundry other honest-to-goodness ranch proposition things. Wild Jay couldn't but notice him, on account of his being so unspeakably helpless, in some ways, and so unutterably exasperating in others.

Some men are just naturally appealing in one phase, and just fall short of being handled man-fashion in another phase. Hubert was thataway. Now he had two dogs that would grace the environment and fit into the scheme of things of Wild Jay's ranch. And probably, being a Yankee, he'd snick some snort of a bargain into the matter. If Hubert'd been real sociable and a genuine rancher kind of man, he'd never made any bones of the matter. If Wild Jay wanted anything some old-timer had, a kind of neighborly hint would have been sufficient. But Hubert would sell anything he had, and had a price on it beyond all reason.

No dog but a bird dog was ever worth more than ten dollars, that is certain. No bird dog was ever worth less than twenty-five dollars, and some are worth a thousand—as stands to reason. Dogs pursuing wolves across the salt grass surely aren't bird dogs; that's as true as sunshine or summer showers. So Wild Jay sent Rup Timkone over to engage Hubert in casual conversation and ask how much those two loud speaking dogs were held at! And to pay spot cash, or trade in a mule, four steers, or in fact anything, providing ten dollars each was the cash limit. Nobody, between neighbors, of course, would hesitate about throwing in mules or steers, if one's fancy ran special to something; as for example, loud dogs.

Wild Jay would have been unspeakably humiliated, if he had thought any one would catch him paying more than ten dollars cash for a dog. He, however, slid from under the disgrace by offering steers or mules, up to a hundred or so dollars, just to show he was neighborly. And what was Wild Jay's dismay when Timkone brought word back that the dogs weren't for sale. In the old days, back home in the Down East country, Hubert had been a fox hunter, and he longed for the music of baying hounds on a fox track. But the nearest approach to a fox was a prairie wolf, so Hubert accepted the two imported dogs at enormous expense, and went to it.

PRAIRIE wolves are something like foxes. They run from dogs, they run a circuitous course, and they have runways along which a hunter can post himself, and sometimes get a whack with a big shotgun or a small rifle.

"An', you know," Timkone declared, "that feller ain't all there. Hubert's killed four wolves, already, and he says it's almost like being back home in God's country, up in New England."

"What? Salt grass country like Yankee land?" Wild Jay looked at the sky and felt insulted, but he couldn't lay tongue to the logic of it. "And he won't sell me them dogs, er trade 'em. 'Course, that close fisted scoundrel wouldn't give'm to me."

"Nope, he shore ain't goin' to give 'em to anybody," Timkone declared.

"Well, I want them dogs," Wild Jay said angrily.

In the old days conditions were a bit careless in the cattle country. Tradition even says that people went so far as to

possess themselves of other men's herds, by a process of violent assimilation; perhaps killing the owners; perhaps just running the cattle off across the country; perhaps by performing tiresome but efficient artistic work by adding to and working up brands already laid with blue hot iron on the flanks of animals.

No one ever invented a way of eradicating a brand. Always the process of assimilation consisted of adding, for example, a curlicue to an O to make it a Q, or working a V into a W, an N into an M, and so until after a time there were exceedingly elaborate brands which were a great source of pride to the owners thereof; because it was a mighty queer and intricate brand that couldn't somehow be evolved into theirs. Great numbers of varied brands could, clandestinely, be worked over into the picture desired by the haughty baron with the all inclusive insignia of ownership.

Wild Jay not only had a brand like a section out of an Aztec monument, but he had also almost all the letters of the alphabet registered in various conditions of Lazy, Reverse, Topsy-Turvy, Boxed, Egged, Hatched and Slovens in order to be prepared for emergencies; but this dog-gone Yankee Hubert had come along with a new one, the Handsaw brand, about a foot long and shaped up with teeth, fancy handle and all. Course, not in many years, had Wild Jay had any brand troubles, or even thought of possessing his neighbor's property. Oh, possibly, now and then seeing something particularly fine, as a nice young and likely calf, or she-stuff of promise, perhaps he'd kind of keep up the practise of not forgetting how. Such incidents were just jokes. But no one in his senses ever played such jokes on Wild Jay, no indeedy.

Wild Jay grew morose. Every once in awhile he'd see those two dogs. They were mighty useful. They were industrious, efficient and sheering, so the prairie wolves were kept nervous and exercised. The booming bay of the dogs would startle every wolf for miles, and the moment the dogs began to cold trail. wolves would be so uneasy they would dart from *motte* to timber belt, worrying till they knew just which wolf was being run. Then the chosen victim would light out, and begin the long, sweaty and dangerous race for life—with the odds against him, for mud would clot up his tail, and any corner, any *motte*, any timber crossing was apt to harbor the gunner with a great lust for shooting.

And Wild Jay schemed to own those two dogs, whose owner was so unneighborly that he was willing that Wild Jay should grow ugly and even sick, rather than give up two miserably ornery hound dogs. Wild Jay would have been glad to give half the dogs on his ranch, and there must have been a hundred or so, for those two loud speakers.

Never before had Wild Jay thought of anything more inconsequential than hogs, bird dogs, negroes or poor whites. Now he was fretting himself about two hound dogs. He knew better. He was puzzled at himself. For the first time in his life he fell to analyzing his moods and ideas. All unconsciously, he began to consider psychology, but nobody in the wide, wide salt grass would have told him he was doing that. Imagine using a word like that to Wild Jay's face! Ho-law! Some adventurer, with great daring, and looking for a kick in life, might casually, with a smile, use language like that to Wild Jay—but not seriously, with grim face.

Wild Jay's obsession overflowed, of course. One of the frankest men in the world, Wild Jay Hammon would no more keep a secret from his friends than he'd really do a mean act, even when he was coveting his neighbor's hound dogs. A passing shower dropped eight inches of water on the Upper Pasture and naturally covered everything with inundation, till too-narrow bayous rivers and creeks could carry it off. And, naturally, that Yankee man's woman inconsiderately took that exact occasion of the thunderstorm and high water to be taken ill, and the fool husband started in an automo-

bile to go for the doctor. Of course, he mired down. And along came Wild Jay on a mule. Wild Jay brought the doctor —cussing himself for thus permitting the perpetuating of the Yankee species in the salt grass country. But a neighbor's a neighbor, no matter what he is.

"Say you, Sam Boots!" Wild Jay, in desperation, demanded of one of his best and most reliable negroes. "I've a job fo' you. Just don't you do anything now till you've roped and brought in those two hound dogs of Hubert's; understand me, Sam?"

"Yas, suh!" Sam grinned, and rode away.

Sam rode out into the sunny pasture, looking around. Presently, in about a week, the dogs came running, running slowly, but exuding miles on miles of music that echoed against the timber belts and ravished the desolation of salt grass quiet.

And Sam Boots, cutting in behind the wolf, came to the hot trail. As the two dogs started by, oblivious to all else but the scent in the grass, the cow hand dropped a noose that fell over the leader of the two and snatched him headlong, stretched out on the ground. Then Sam hogtied the dog and wrapped a twine around the animal's jaw, to carry him in.

Unless some one had powerful glasses, good for ten miles, the deed passed unobserved, and the dog, ignobly bagged in a burlap, rode in like a beef hide on Sam's saddle. Sam's was not to reason why, but to do. He had done, and he delivered the dog to Wild Jay.

WILD JAY had never had a very close look at the two dogs. He had just heard them passing, and he had heard them from two miles, or even five miles away when the air was heavy and carried the sound well. He emptied the dog out of the bag and saw it lying, whistling and agitated, straining at the uncomfortable bonds; especially the one around the jaws.

Wild Jay grinned, handing the negro a silver dollar, admonishing silence. If anybody told about this dog's disappearance and its captor, might everlasting and eternal torment rest upon his gossiping soul! Wild Jay put a collar on the dog, cut the bonds, and the hound stood up to shake its bones together and its hair straight. Then Wild Jay blinked, turned his face to the skies and opened wide his mouth to talk, to curse, to roar, to cry and to be inestimably condemned for all the rest of his existence—if Hank Hubert weren't a perpetually ineffable, confiscatory, blue baked, hump souled Brahma crossbreed.

"He's done gone an' branded his dawgs!" Wild Jay roared. "An' how can I blot the blasted Handsaw brand off'n a dawg? I can't dye that dog, 'count of that brand! It'd show through the coloring!"

He couldn't. He had never discovered a way to blot the Handsaw on a beef or mule, let alone on a dog. And he wanted that dog more than he wanted anything else in all the salt grass, at that moment. But law and brands and customs and habits—and the blamed Yankee trick—labeled that dog as the Yankee's for all time. He couldn't even make dogskin gloves out of that hide, without feeling conscience smitten, so he took off the collar and hoisted the dog through the window with his huge shoe.

The dog hit the ground and, yelping, headed down the pasture and again took up the wolf trail, approximately where he had left off. He resumed the filling of the salt grass with the melodious and running bay of a slow trailer with a large chest expansion.

Wild Jay sat dejected, disconsolate, cotton in his ears, partly because a norther had given him an earache, and partly because he hated to hear noises when the most musical and fascinating sound of all wasn't one that he could claim for his own.

When spring came, and the beef and she-stuff and young stock were being moved up from the lower pasture, out of the mucky salt grass into the summer

pastures, there was no time or reason for hounding wolves. Everybody was busy, and Wild Jay's crew, when they came across a Handsaw brand in the roundup, were told to hunt the blasted worm eaten scoundrel out.

Hubert came riding over to see if anybody had seen a five year old steer, with a white spot face, and a crooked horn, a red hide, a white hoof, and weighing about three hundred. He had missed such an animal out of six hundred and thirteen head, leaving him only six hundred and twelve head, and if it was a small steer, it would bring standard $23.40, and really, of course, a man can't afford to lose $23.40.

Now the roundup meant gathering and holding about 11,400 head. It meant sorting out thirty or forty brands, a good many of them strays. Hubert had taken care of his own. He had them all bunched, held and taken to his own grass. Only, of course, he had missed that steer. So, accordingly, nine ranchers, with an aggregate of half a million acres and probably sixty thousand head of cattle to bother themselves about, gathered around the Yankee and had him describe his lost steer.

Wild Jay wanted to know the details. Grave of face, low of voice, shrewd of eye, Wild Jay started at the nose, which was rather yellow, but with a black map on it, like the continent of Australia, and led up over the shoulders, down to the left hind hoof, which was white, and to the tail, which was thicker haired on one side than the other, and along the ribs, back, and to the particular wattles on the chest and the slash on the ears. And Hubert, in his great anxiety, told enough about that one runt steer to yield evidence on the ownership of a thousand head of curly rumps.

By and by, out in the herd, where the boys were cutting, there was a yell, and then such a dash and excitement as nearly stampeded the whole bunch, including those already cut out. There was a circling of ropes and splendid work by ponies and cowpunchers.

"We got that steer!" a voice, one of Wild Jay's loudest and proudest, announced, and everybody rode to see.

They had the Hubert steer, in question. Then while four ropes held four legs, and a man sat on the head, and another pulled the tail, the ranchers went over the steer from the bent horn to the tail, confirming each and every statement of Hubert's regarding that steer. They even parted the hair of the tail in the middle and compared the sizes, and confirmed Hubert's keenness of observation, that one side was heavier than the other.

WILD JAY sent for his automobile. They loaded the steer into the tonneau; it was a fine big seven-passenger touring car. The steer was delivered in state at Hank Hubert's ranch, and Hubert rode alone over to his herd and sat staring at it a long time, wondering.

What had he done to merit all that elaborate irony, all the sarcasm and rebuffing and sneering and snorting? He sighed. He didn't want to be an outsider. He just wanted to be a he-man among he-men. He was making more money than anybody. He made money when old-timers at the game failed and were sold out by the ten per cent. banks. He was making up for the big loss, his own failure, when his dairy farm went down under hoof and mouth.

Wild Jay was at the bottom of it all, that was certain. Wild Jay was the biggest lunged and largest hearted man in the land. What ailed him, anyhow? So Hubert went and talked to his banker about it. He made a clean breast of the whole business. Wild Jay was growing meaner and surlier and harder to bear every day. Hubert was peaceable and didn't want any trouble with his neighbors. Still, he wasn't afraid.

"Course, I'm a Yankee," Hubert said. "On that account I sure mustn't flinch. My folks began fighting Indians at six miles west of Plymouth Rock; they dug in at Bunker Hill, and they was partly

with John Paul Jones and partly with Ethan Allen during subsequent proceedings. They're too darn stubborn to let on how scared they are, come a tight pinch. But, by jimps, if you can't find out what ails Wild Jay, I'll ride over there some day and ask him pretty blamed particular myself."

"Just let me make a few inquiries," the general adviser suggested.

Then one day, receiving a telephone message to "call at the bank," Hubert rode uptown. He had his carbine in his saddle boot, and he was going to stop in at Wild Jay's on his way back from the train. The old man told him that if he needed ten thousand dollars to buy cattle up in East Texas hills, it would be all right. Then there was a patch of four thousand seven hundred acres of pasture for sale, with one corner adjoining Hubert's upper pasture. And so on, the banker going into diverse things. And finally he said—

"Oh, by the way, Hubert, you have two hound dogs, haven't you?"

"Why, I did have two," Hubert admitted.

"Rid of them?"

"Oh, no. Got 'em yet. 'Leven more, besides—pups."

"That right? Why—um-m—Wild Jay admires the breed very much, Hubert," the banker said diplomatically. "You see, they're loud voiced—"

"Oh, yes! They're bell mouthed fox hounds. Friend of mine sent me down a pair, knowing how I missed fox hunting. You say Wild Jay likes them? Why—um-m—oh, I see! Much obliged."

Hubert went away. Yankee-like, he didn't even tell the banker what he had in mind. He went home. He went out to look at his dog house, a fine kennel on blocks, with a fancy runway and all that, including a watering trough with fixings.

Eleven pups were wandering around, fighting, wrestling, yelping and raising their voices generally. The animals were nearly two months old and growing out of all proportion to the practical needs of the Handsaw brand ranch.

"Hey, Jack!" Hubert called to one of his hands. "Pick seven of the squallingest of these pups and take them over to Wild Jay's, with my compliments, will you?"

"All right, boss!"

Jack nodded and came to choose the loudest speakers.

Presently Jack rode away in the light truck. He returned in about an hour.

"Wild Jay ain't to home, but I left them," Jack reported.

Wild Jay didn't return till toward four o'clock the next morning. He gave orders that he wasn't to be called till seven o'clock, late breakfast time. He wasn't feeling good, for he'd lost playing poker, and liquor gave him a stomach ache, and he had a flat tire coming home, which made the car ride hard. Seemed like everything had gone wrong.

So Wild Jay went to sleep, and about daybreak he began to hear things. He heard them so much that he awakened and started up, cursing and declaring that of all bedlams and misery, none that he'd ever heard of rivaled the confusion on his place, on those mornings when he particularly wanted rest and sleep.

"What the Hades is going on, anyhow?" he shouted, rearing up and into his pants.

Running out on the front balcony, he saw seven pups of lank and gangling size, with huge heads, long ears, deep, wide chests and a black and tan color. He knew all the dogs on his place, but he had never seen these animals, which were tumbling in somersaults and bellowing in the shrill but unmistakably promising voices of puphood.

"Where in—hey! Frank-Ed, you yellow unbespeakable, where'd these dawgs come from?"

"Why, Misteh Hammon!" The black man grinned, from ear to ear. "That white boss of the Handsaw bran', Jack, he come yeah yest'd'y ev'ing an' left these yeah dawgs with Misteh Hube't's pussonal an' exaclusive compliment. Yeh,

he did! Jes lak dat! An' yo' know, I ain' neveh did git to see no sech awful yappin' an' squealin' and rearin' dog talk as these yeah pups made, no, suh! My lan', Misteh Hammon, I shore admiah to have one of these yeah pups."

"What! Yo' black rapscal—if yo' lay one lil' finger on the measliest of these yeah dawgs, you know what I'll do?"

"Oh, I wan't on'y jes' foolin', Misteh Hammon! Why, when those dawgs is growed up, Misteh Hammon, yo' cain't hear yo'se'f on this ranch, no, suh."

Wild Jay grinned, glared at the dogs, and then stretched.

"Oh, well, I was goin' to get up early this mornin', anyhow," he declared, grumbling to himself as he sat on his heel, looking at the pack of noisy young hound dogs. "Dadblastedest racket I eveh hearn!"

Summoned to breakfast, he ate with both hands, as though he meant it, pondering and mumbling to himself. After an hour or two of wandering around the outfit in an absent minded mood, he ordered a saddled mule and rode off across country, straight toward the domain of the Handsaw brand, an air of determination in his bearing.

He found his neighbor Hubert with a quart bottle that had perhaps at some time contained soda water, with an improvised and economical nipple, feeding a small, weak calf. Wild Jay sighed at that bother. His own way would have been to cut the beast's throat.

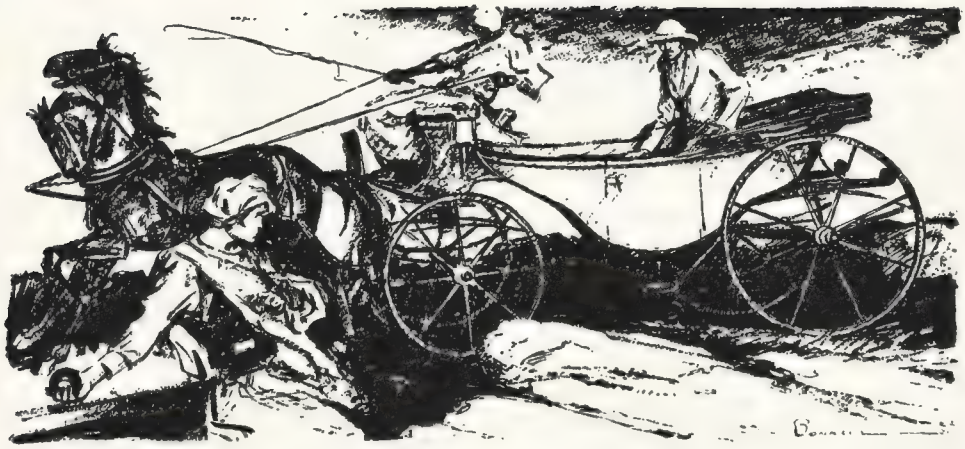
"Howdy!" Wild Jay boomed, and Hubert jumped, surprised. "One of my boys said yo' had a sick calf. 'Lowed I'd betteh come oveh'n' see 'f I couldn't ride to Hoston an' bring in a vet'nary perfessor."

"Why, Mr. Hammon," the Yankee exclaimed, objecting forthwith. "That'd cost ten dollars. This calf isn't worth four dollars and seventy-eight cents. That'd be a loss of five-twenty-two."

"Yeh, but hit'd be worth somethin', savin' the poor shiftless calf's life," Hammon declared seriously. "Course, 'tain't none of my business. Hit's yo' calf. Well, I was passin' by—thought I'd drap in. S'long!"

Wild Jay whooped, spurred his big man mule, and squashed away off across the vast prairie toward the far horizon. Hubert watched him ride till he was a fleck in the distance. Wild Jay was mad, mean, but an enemy no more. Seven noisy pups had made all the difference in the world, even though the rancher hadn't mentioned them. In fact, the old boy obviously hadn't been able to speak of those hound dogs because he would choke all up with emotion and gratitude.

"My land!" Hubert sighed. "It's a fine country, but sure hard to get the hang of."



AN OVERT ACT

A Tale of India

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

GEORGE WESTON came down from Paniristan to consult the civil surgeon. After being diagnosed and radiographed, he went to ask H. Farlington-Steele for sick leave.

"I feel rather guilty, wanting leave with conditions as they are in Paniristan," said Weston. "I don't want you to think I'm shirking when my job as political agent becomes difficult. But the civil surgeon says I must go home immediately for an operation. You can see on these X-ray photos—"

"Weston," interrupted Farlington-Steele, "how turbulent are things in Paniristan at this moment?"

He was not even looking at Weston, who patiently put away his X-ray photos. Weston might have remembered that his chief was not interested in matters as trivial as human ailments.

"The past two weeks have been calm," said Weston, "ominously calm. I'm afraid there's a storm about to break."

"And that firebrand, Yatim Imandar?" asked the chief.

"He's been much too quiet since the Russian trade mission visited Paniristan," Weston replied. "He'll bear watching."

"You can't get the maharajah to lock him up?"

Weston laughed tolerantly.

"In the first place, the maharajah is not interested in affairs of state," he said. "And in the second place, his Highness is afraid to lay hands on the firebrand since Imandar started revolt among the palace guards a few months ago."

Farlington-Steele abstractly contemplated the ceiling, where a *punkah* swished vainly in an effort to stir up a breath of air.

"Weston," he announced. "Inside of two months Paniristan will become a corridor for the passage of arms bound for rebels within our own frontiers. We've got to prevent it."

"You must know, sir, that in view of

the mountainous character of the country, the only certain prevention can come from military occupation of Paniristan," said Weston.

"Exactly what government has decided," said Farlington-Steele.

"When do our troops go in?"

Farlington-Steele folded his arms. The corners of his mouth twitched in the faintest indication of a smile—a patronizing smile it would certainly have been had it come to the surface.

"When I first came East thirty years ago, the answer to your question would have been 'tomorrow,' " said Farlington-Steele. "However, our modern statesmen have been toying with a metaphysical conception of politics which they call international ethics. You must remember, Weston, that technically Paniristan is an independent state. Technically you as political agent are merely a sort of ambassador and advisor to a technically friendly power. Under tutelage of their neighbors to the north, our enemies in Paniristan wisely use that state as an incubator for revolt, saving the actual hatching of violence for within our own borders. We have, therefore, no patent reason for military occupation. If our troops moved into Paniristan tomorrow, the next day there would be questions in parliament, the position of the cabinet would be jeopardized, opposition papers would make an issue of it, the League of Nations would appoint a commission of inquiry and, undoubtedly, a fund would be raised in America for the cause of Paniri freedom. Our part in this business consists in furnishing an excuse for occupation. We must have an overt act against Great Britain."

The chief fixed Weston with an unblinking stare until he felt compelled to say something.

"What sort of an overt act, sir?" he asked.

"Something violent," said Farlington-Steele. "Something to show the world that the rajah of Paniristan is not capable of protecting foreign life and property. Possibly an explosion. The political agent's bungalow might be blown up, for instance."

Weston's lips parted, then closed again, expressionless. His eyes, fixed upon his chief, seemed to be smiling a trifle wistfully, resignedly. He said nothing.

Farlington-Steele unfolded his arms with a gesture of reassurance.

"Don't worry, Weston," he said. "You'll be home on sick leave. I wouldn't risk losing a seasoned man like you. But you're going back to Paniristan today for two weeks or so."

"The civil surgeon said—"

"The civil surgeon is a fool. You'll stay on the job until your successor arrives. Let things take their course, because I'm sending some green chap to follow you in. I want somebody whose incompetence will help the confusion and hurry the climax."

"It shouldn't take two weeks to find a bungler, with all our personnel to draw from," said Weston. "There are—"

"Goodby, Weston."

Weston got up, cast a lingering glance at a large map of India on the wall, and walked out slowly, solemnly.

A WEEK later Farlington-Steele was ready with the final details of his Paniristan scheme. The fact that the newly arrived home mail lay unopened on his desk since morning was the only indication that he was thinking about the matter. His face showed no trace of emotion; his subordinates always suspected he had none. They understood that for the good of India and the Empire, he allowed himself to feel only in terms of thought, and to think only in terms of Empire. The temperature of his blood must never rise above thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit.

He called a *chaprassi.*

"Is Mr. Pereira here yet?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Send him in."

The *chaprassi* showed in a very black and rather thin gentleman wearing a blue *pugaree* and the caste marks of a Rajput Brahman.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" asked the black gentleman with an Oxford accent that did not match either his color or his costume.

"Hello, Pereira," said Farlington-Steele. "How long have you been in town?"

"Ever since the day after I received your message, sir. I have been waiting impatiently for further word from you, as the *dharmsala* you designated as my temporary residence is decidedly uncomfortable."

Farlington-Steele gazed at the black man for a full minute without speaking. Standing before him, Pereira appeared completely native, despite his name, which indicated European blood, and his accent, which indicated European education. Yet there was something about him which was neither European nor Indian—an inhuman aura which conveyed something of the refined cruelty of some animals. It may have been the strange yellowish tinge in the whites of his eyes; it may have been the unusual sharpness of his dark, thin features; it was probably something more subtle, some essence of his inner nature which made the very claw-like movements of his long fingers expressive of a sinister sadism.

"Ever been to Paniristan?" asked Farlington-Steele suddenly.

"No, sir."

"Are you known there at all?"

"I don't believe so, sir."

"How are your hill dialects?"

"I can speak enough to be mistaken for —well, not a hill man, but at least a northern Bengali."

"All right. Beginning tomorrow you will be a Bengali. You will be a Bengali agitator, a fugitive from justice because of acts of violence against the British *raj*. However, your flight beyond the frontier will be no sign of cowardice; it will merely indicate your desire to maintain your freedom for further work. This work will consist of organizing the feeling against us in Paniristan, of stimulating their lethargic hate into action. You will be—"

"An *agent provocateur*, as usual," Pereira broke in. He was still standing, and Farlington-Steele, who made no move to ask him to sit down, went on:

"I am merely making use of your peculiar talents. You will be at particular pains to insist upon the mythical nature of Paniri independence. You will point to the presence of a British political agent in Paniristan as giving the lie to a free state. You will even paint the political agent as a tyrant."

"You refer to Mr. Weston?"

"No. Mr. Weston will be replaced next week by a man named Edward Luce. Before he arrives, however, you will have established your standing with local agitators by smuggling in a case of dynamite, which, when discovered later, will be found to bear Russian labels. Some of it, however, might be used as a political gesture. In fact, I think I should like an explosion, Pereira—one that will be heard in Whitehall . . . However, instructions are superfluous for a man with your genius for atrocity, Pereira."

"Thank you, sir."

"There will be no need to communicate further with me. Pick up the explosives at Zilabad. I am giving you a case of dynamite with reduced sensitivity to stand the ordinary jolts of smuggling it through the mountains. You will have to see that it is fired with fuses and fulminating caps, which you will also pick up at Zilabad. Goodby, Pereira."

"Goodby, sir."

Farlington-Steele watched the Eurasian walk out the door, noting that he limped almost imperceptibly with his right foot.

"By the way, Pereira." The Eurasian stopped, as the chief called, "Stay away from the railway station for the next few hours. I have a man coming in on the three o'clock train who I would rather did not see you."

"I understand, sir."

For a few seconds after Pereira had disappeared, the chief stared into space. Then he arose, went to a metal filing cabinet and picked out a card headed "Luce, Edward". He studied it as he returned to his desk, then laid it aside. Finally he got to the week's mail.

He ran through the letters with a glance and tossed them aside. Then he tore the wrappers off the six home newspapers, unfolded them, arranged them in chronological order, and began reading the details of the cricket test match between England and Australia. Once, when he heard a train whistle, he looked up and glanced at his watch. Then he continued reading, and had got as far as the luncheon interval of the second day with Australia still at bat, when a *chaprassi* announced—

"Luce *sahib, aya hai.*"

FARLINGTON-STEELE put the newspapers in a drawer of his desk as Edward Luce entered with a step that was almost jaunty. He had made no efforts toward a ceremonial costume to meet his chief—khaki shorts, a travel stained shirt, topee under one arm, a crooked pipe in his mouth. Farlington-Steele made no comment, although he again failed to offer a chair. Luce was not intimidated in the least; he sat on a corner of the chief's desk.

It is quite probable that Farlington-Steele disliked this sort of thing immensely. He had been a colonel in France during the world war, and colonels as a rule did not receive their subordinates thus. He disdained to notice any excess of informality on Luce's part, however.

"Luce," he said, after greetings had been exchanged, "if I judge correctly, your idea of this Indian service has been one great lark, hasn't it?"

"Well, it hasn't turned out to be such a lark as I'd hoped," said Luce, knocking out his pipe ashes against the heel of his shoe.

"At any rate, your record in Calcutta has not been particularly brilliant."

The chief sat with his hands neatly folded on the desk as he talked in an impersonal monotone. His voice matched exactly his chill gray eyes, the precise spikes of his steel gray mustache, his bloodless lips and long, angular jaw.

"No, not particularly brilliant, sir," agreed Luce. "In fact, quite dull."

"Among other things," the chief went on, consulting the card he had removed from the filing cabinet, "you were found drunk with a Hindu boatman on a pontoon under Howrah bridge—"

"I remember that." Luce's blue eyes brightened. "I was working on a case—spotting jute barges, if I'm not mistaken—and I got what I was after, too, if you—"

"You were taken in a police raid on a clandestine rain game in Mooktaram Baboos Street; you staggered into the tank in Dalhousie Square while acting as escort for the Maharajah of Darpur; you were frequently seen in public, or gossiping in the bazaars with Indians of low caste . . .

"I won't go into detail of the complaints that have been made against you. Suffice it to say that they all reflect the evidence that you are entirely unaware of the ideals and traditions of this service."

"Not at all. I—"

"However, I am going to give you one more chance. I am going to send you to Paniristan."

"Fine."

"Wait. This is likely to be a dangerous post."

Luce laughed.

"The perils and temptations of the Orient are grossly exaggerated," he said, filling his pipe. "I've never seen a man as dangerous or a woman as beautiful as the books tell about."

"Laugh if you like. That is your own lookout. I merely warn you that you will run across extremely difficult problems in Paniristan. Moreover, you will be in a position of responsibility for the first time since you have been in the service. Temporarily, you are to be political agent in the mountain capital."

"Well! This is good news."

"Perhaps. In any event, this is not a job to be done by wasting your time in vicious resorts, or by fraternizing with low caste natives. The job requires some dignity, and I am frank to say I do not believe you can do it. However, I'm giving you the chance. If you succeed in

altering my opinion, I will be fair enough to propose you for decoration—perhaps posthumously."

Farlington-Steele pronounced the word "posthumously" with sonorous distinctness.

Luce took his pipe from his mouth and laughed. To Farlington-Steele it seemed a trifle nervously.

"As bad as that? Well, I once won a coffin in a poker game in Shanghai," he said. "I should have kept it to take with me to Paniristan. When do I go up?"

Farlington-Steele did not smile.

"Go back to Calcutta and wind up your affairs there," he said. "Report by the first of the month to Mr. Weston, the present political agent. He will give you instructions."

As Luce left, the corners of Farlington-Steele's severe mouth turned up a trifle in the merest suggestion of a sneer.

The chief picked up the card headed "Luce, Edward", re-read it, then tossed it carelessly aside. The card slid over the edge of the desk and fluttered into the wastebasket—prophetically, Farlington-Steele might have said had he seen it. He did not see it, however. He was busy taking his newspapers from a drawer to resume reading about the cricket test match.

EDWARD LUCE arrived in Paniristan full of youthful enthusiasm.

He was also full of statistical information. For instance, he knew that Paniristan had an area of 1800 square miles, that in its mountainous confines were elevations of 800 and of 28,000 feet, that its vegetation ranged from the tropical orchid to the alpine gentian, and that it had a population of 117,227, of whom 46,513 were Buddhists, 39,202 Hindus, 31,165 Mohammedans, 321 Sikhs, 17 Jains, and 9 Christians. All these facts he had gleaned from standard works on the subjects while his train was rushing him from Calcutta through paddy fields starry with fireflies at night, and across sun baked plains by day. His conception of Paniristan was as dry as the parched mud villages that he passed on his way.

Then he left the train puffing its way across the flatness of the plains, while he turned to the north, where the horizon buckled and pushed upward into the purple mists and shadows of evening. The mere sight of the distant mountains communicated something of the mystery and blind energy of the border uplands, gave him a brief sense of foreboding, which may have been reaction to the realization that adventure and the unknown now lay before him.

The following day, as his hired car bumped, rattled and chugged on three cylinders over wooded roads twisting along ledges gouged out of precipitous slopes that skirted empty distances, he tossed away his official surveys and handbooks. Paniristan, he concluded, was something more than words and figures, and he would like to see it from all angles.

Fifteen miles from his goal, he sent the car ahead with his bearer and his baggage, to tell the present political agent that he had been delayed. He loitered an hour in a hill village, engaging a pony *tonga*, and eating *brinjal* curry with the driver. He then further won the confidence of the driver by buying palm wine and losing a rupee to him matching copper pice. Thus, on his arrival in the capital of the mountain state, the driver took him not to the political officer's bungalow, but to an establishment run by a Marwari, where there were games of chance more intricate than matching coppers.

The Marwari's establishment centered on a little court filled with rotund *babus*, bearded merchants, gaunt, six-foot Pathans, and smaller, Mongoloid hillmen, arguing and gesticulating, patiently watching a small tin spout which culminated in a curiously shaped, tilted roof. This was the rain game, at which odds were given against rain in two hours or two days or, during the dry season, two weeks. Bets were paid only when precipitation was sufficient to run off through the spout. In a corner of the court turbaned heads

bobbed anxiously over a row of ten lumps of sugar, wagering furiously as to the lump on which a fly would first settle. Other games were in progress in rooms off the court—a bean game in one, a sort of chess tournament in another, for the benefit of strict Mohammedans. Here a man could bet on anything. If there were not enough games, the keen eyed, waddling Marwari proprietor would invent some.

Luce spent an undignified day loafing at the Marwari's, playing a little, knocking about the bazaars, picking up scraps of information he knew he would never get at first hand once his official status was revealed. When he finally presented himself at the official bungalow, he was an unshaven, somewhat unkempt fellow in khaki shorts—the sort of European who might be seen in disreputable spots, without caste to lose by eating native sweets with his fingers or mingling with Indians below the rank of rajah. But to George Weston who greeted him on the veranda of the bungalow, he was just a youth with the cards stacked against him—a big-boned, easy going, sandy haired chap, with good humored blue eyes and a democratic smile.

Weston, a neat little man with graying temples, sensitive mouth and wise wrinkles about the corners of his eyes, shook his head when Luce made his reappearance after changing clothes.

"It's a crime to send a boy like you up here," he said.

Luce grinned.

"Youth must be served," he said.

Weston poured out short ones in front of a blazing grate fire. The temperature was easily fifty degrees cooler than on the plains, a scant fifty miles away; much too chilly for veranda drinking in the evening. Luce could see fog lying in the ravines below the spur on which the mountain capital was built. The bungalow was situated nearly at the tip of the spur, so that through the windows Luce could see the town, dense clusters of white houses clinging to the steep hillside like frightened sheep. Streets flowed down among the huddled buildings like frozen torrents. A road from the bungalow led past the buttresses of a Tibetan lamasery and served as coping for a cliff that made a sheer lower boundary for the town.

"HOW OLD are you, Luce?" asked Weston, offering a brimming glass that smelled of orange bitters.

"About twenty-eight. I haven't counted up lately."

Weston shook his head again.

"I'm just as surprised as you are that they picked me for a job like this," said Luce. "I'm not even an administrator. They had me on an anonymous sort of job in Calcutta. Investigator. Insipid business—going to Government House teas and whatnot, to keep tab on what aging rajahs do when they come to town for the cold weather."

"Wish you were back there, don't you?"

"Hell, no!" Luce was emphatic. "I like to move around. Besides, it was a silly job. I used to keep from being bored to death by sneaking off to some disgraceful place or other north of Harrison Road —Gunga Lal's rain game, like as not. The best people raised their eyebrows at my being seen in native gambling places."

"You gamble much?"

"Enough. There are only nine or ten things I'd rather do. Besides, standing in front of the spout of a rain game roof is a great place to rub elbows with India, the best spot to learn the vernacular dialects —even it if is bad form to fraternize with the natives. I know the chief didn't think much of my behavior in Calcutta. That's probably why he sent me up here—" he grinned—"so I wouldn't disgrace the service quite so publicly."

Weston looked through the window at a countryside turned on end. Then he focused compassionate eyes on Luce.

"Why, yes; possibly," he said.

"The chief thinks I've been vaccinated against what he calls the traditions of the service," Luce went on. "Maybe he's

right. I'd been knocking around the East for some years—China, the Straits, Burma—without much aim or reason; just a hip-to-mouth existence, so to speak. I thought I wanted some sort of official status, something to tie to. But I seem to have been wrong. I'm always backsliding."

"But you're young enough to be still steeped in the creed."

"The creed?" Luce paused in the midst of lighting his pipe.

"Yes. You know: the destiny of the white race, the duty of an enlightened nation to the rest of the world, the glory of men who die to build the empire, to carry civilization to the far corners of the world—"

"The white man's burden sort of thing?"

"Exactly. What do you think of it?"

"It makes good speeches for men like Farlington-Steele," Luce replied, "and excellent reading. Glamourous."

"Reading and glamour aside, now that you've had your nose in all of this, do you still think it's glorious to—to die for the empire?"

"Why not?" Luce laughed a little, watching little puffs of smoke float up past the end of his nose. "It must be a damned sight more fun dying for the empire than falling off a tram or getting hit by a Piccadilly bus, or even getting smothered to death in a coal mine. I can vouch for that, because I used to work underground in a colliery once. But why all this talk of dying? First the chief promises me a posthumous decoration, and now you begin. Is this part of the initiation of a young political officer about to take a new post?"

Weston made great ado about pouring another drink. Troubled furrows appeared between his eyebrows. He moistened his lips.

"If you have any sort of flair that a political agent might be expected to have," he said, "I won't have to answer your question. You'll feel the enmity in the air as soon as you're twenty-four hours in Paniristan."

"I've been here twenty-four hours already," said Luce.

"How's that?"

Luce grinned.

"I've been looking around the bazaars," said Luce. "Fraternizing again—even gambling a little."

"And you weren't aware of an undercurrent of hostility against the foreigner?"

"Well, yes; some," said Luce. "I saw the local Garibaldi in action, a chap named Yatim Imandar. It seems he's usually fairly quiet, but in the bazaar they say that he's been stirred to talking violence by a Bengali agitator who has been working overtime brewing trouble."

"Who is this?" Weston leaned forward, suddenly interested.

"He claims to be a Bengali agitator exiled from British India for subversive activities. He says his name is Das, and he limps."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes. At the Marwari's rain game."

Weston slapped the table.

"That clears a mystery," said Weston. "A letter came for you today, and I wondered how news of your appointment had preceded you—*Chaprassi!* Luce *sahib ka chitti lao.*"

"But he doesn't know who I am. Nobody knows me here."

"Somebody does." Weston took an envelop from the turbaned servant who appeared. He tossed it across the table. "Somebody in Paniristan, evidently. The chit was delivered by messenger today and, as you'll notice, it's addressed to 'Edward Luce, Esquire, British Political Agent for Paniristan'."

As Luce ripped open the letter and scanned the written lines his puzzled expression gave way to one of blank surprise.

"I'll be damned!" he exclaimed. "It's from Das. How the hell—?"

"He is undoubtedly a clever as well as dangerous man."

"He wants to meet me tonight, informally, to discuss means of avoiding what appears certain to develop into catastrophe."

"But of course you won't go."

"Of course I will. Why not?"

"You can't do a thing like that." Weston arose and stared at Luce, then turned abruptly, walked to the window and gazed at the fog swirling up from the depths below. Slowly he faced about and said with an effort to be deliberate, "This may be a trap. You don't know who this man Das might be."

"There's nothing to be afraid of," said Luce lightly. "He merely likes to talk—like all Bengalis."

Weston was pacing the room nervously.

"This man has been inciting to violence. He talks of crossing the border to attack our frontier garrisons," said Weston. "You must point this out to the maharajah. Demand that both Das and Yatim Imandar be arrested. Threaten British intervention."

"Nonsense," said Luce. "Das would welcome arrest. Why make a martyr of him? His cause would gain followers."

"You can't let this thing get out of hand, Luce."

"No, but I think I can arrange things without making martyrs. Let them talk, if they like it. And I'll talk with them. We'll come to some arrangement."

Weston sketched a hopeless gesture with his right hand, sat down, and stared out the window. He appeared lost in contemplation of the fog that swept by in dancing wisps and tatters, blurring the massive buttresses and towers of the lamasery, obliterating the town which hung on the hillside.

LUCE went alone to his rendezvous with Das. He laughed off Weston's idea of taking an armed escort with him, and strode into the night whistling confidently to himself. He was still somewhat puzzled over the supposed Bengali's discovery of his identity, but attached no sinister importance to the fact. The atmosphere of malevolence, the blood red mist of hate which Weston described as hanging over Paniristan, were quite impersonal to Luce. He was altogether insensible to the vague aura of mystic despair exuded by India, here tinged with a strange mountain vitality, a Mongolian vigor lacking on the plains. To him Asiatics were quite within the general scheme of humans, since they ate, drank, and gambled like the Europeans he knew.

He walked through the bazaars, a kaleidoscope of Oriental faces glowing saffron in the light of oil flares, quite as if he were walking down the Strand. The hum of a dozen languages; the flash of the orange light upon the heavy barbaric Himalayan jewelry of the women; the wavering luster of a pyramid of brass pots, the grotesque shadows of piles of furs and hills of vegetables; the shuffle of felt boots and sandals; the smell of perspiration and rancid *ghi* and spices—all blending in a great minor chord of bizarre Oriental harmony—meant nothing out of the ordinary to Luce. He turned up a crooked, steep, odorous alley and climbed toward a lone light that burned like a crimson drop of incandescence in the darkness. Without the slightest misgivings, he entered a house, climbed a stairway, and found himself face to face with the man who called himself Das.

He stood in a room illuminated only by three flickering wicks floating in a bowl of oil. Behind the lights, the man who called himself Das squatted on the padded floor, intent on taking spices from a large copper box and rolling them in a lime smeared betel leaf. He did not look up as Luce came in, but twisted the leaf into a cornucopia, fastened it with a spike of clove, and popped it into his mouth. During this time Luce became aware that there were other men in the room. Beyond the lights, gray patches moved in the shadows. When his eyes had become accustomed to peering beyond the yellow glare, Luce made out turbans, *khadi* caps, the forms of half a dozen dusky men reclining in various postures on the floor.

"You're Mr. Das?" Luce inquired.

The brown man glanced up, nodded, but did not rise. He made a motion for Luce to be seated.

"I was afraid you would not come," he

said. "Most Englishmen would not have come. You see, I know your countrymen well. It was to escape their persecution that I fled from my home in Bengal—"

"Just a moment," said Luce, settling himself on the floor. "Let's be frank with one another. I'll begin by telling you that I'm under no illusion that you're the Bengali agitator you pretend to be."

Das looked up suddenly. The only reply was a yellowish gleam in his cat-like eyes.

"You may possibly be a Bengali," Luce continued, "but you're not an agitator fleeing justice. There's nothing a Bengali politician loves more than going to jail for some political cause. To be jailed by the British is a fine feather in his cap."

"Then what is your theory of my mission in Paniristan?"

"You are very likely an agent for an European power."

The man who called himself Das uncrossed his legs abruptly, then deliberately, slowly, recrossed them. He laughed nervously, leaning forward a trifle.

"What makes you think that?" he asked, with a spark of high tension crackling through an obvious attempt to appear unperturbed.

"Before you came here," said Luce, "Yatim Imandar and his Paniri malcontents were calm and patient. Now they are fireeaters, thanks to you. The process has been the same throughout Asia, where a certain European power has been working to wreck British prestige and influence. The same inflammatory agents are making the Annamites violent against the French in Indo-China. Even before it became interested in world revolution, this power has been intriguing on the northern frontiers of British India. Shall I name the power?"

As the man who called himself Das listened, he leaned back on one elbow, his mahogany features gradually relaxing into a smile of relieved comprehension. He waved a bony hand carelessly.

"I am agent of no power, save the force of liberty," he said. "I am merely helping those who would liberate Paniristan. I shall suggest, naturally, that they lean on that nation which is most sympathetic toward their ambitions. That is why I asked a conference with you."

"And how did you know who I was, and that I was to have this post? Nothing has been announced as yet."

The dusky man's eyes grew vague as his smile continued.

"News travels more swiftly in the bazaar than through official channels. Briefly, this is the situation: As you know, the Maharajah of Paniristan is too wrapped up in his pleasures to be interested in matters of state. The real leader of the people is Yatim Imandar, who, when the moment arrives, will arise to overthrow the old despotic monarchy, with its vassal treaties, and establish a modern, independent state."

"Which one of these gentlemen is Yatim Imandar?" Luce's eyes sought out the faces of the men in the shadows.

"None. Yatim Imandar is not here tonight. I counseled him to remain aloof until I was sure you desired to cooperate with him. Since the affair of the guards' revolt he has to be cautious."

"I should like very much to talk with Yatim Imandar. Tell him to come to my bungalow."

Das's eyes were bright.

"Yatim Imandar would be most anxious to meet you," he said. "Most anxious. Only I hardly think the agency bungalow would be the proper place for the meeting."

"Why not?"

"His coming there would be in a way a sign of subserviency, even if he had confidence that he would not be seized and held prisoner."

"You have my word that nothing should happen to him."

"Yes, I know. Still, you must have a generous gesture."

"I could hardly go to him, for the same reasons he offers. Tonight I could come here because I am still a private individual. But tomorrow my appointment as political agent will be officially gazetted."

"But you could meet him in some neutral spot."

"Yes, I could do that. I could meet him halfway."

Das arose, then limped a few paces to Luce's side.

"I am happy to hear you say that. You must come riding in the agency's best *ghari*, splendid, with British flags on the *ghari*."

"No, no dress parade for me, thanks."

"But you must, really. The meeting must be symbolical. You must come so that the people will recognize you as the symbol of British Empire, just as they will recognize Yatim Imandar as symbol of the people of Paniristan. They must see you both riding toward the meeting place, the symbols of conciliation and understanding."

"And what neutral spot do you suggest?"

"The Old Sarai, by all means. It is neutral, and it will give you the opportunity to cross the entire town. You will pass the lamasery, the mosque, the Hindu temple. You will take the road that runs along the cliff just below the bazaar, which is crowded in the mornings. You will be in full view of the crowd . . . At what time shall I have Yatim Imandar at the Sarai?"

"At ten o'clock. Good night, Mr. Das."

"Good night, Excellence."

The man who called himself Das executed a low salaam. When he straightened up he was smiling—a humorless, inhuman smile.

LUCE returned to the political agent's bungalow to find Weston pacing the floor, attired in a silk dressing gown, his graying hair ruffled, his eyes ten years older than they had been earlier in the evening. Noting an empty bottle on a small table, Luce judged that Weston had been drinking.

"Thank God you're back!" said the older man. "Did they—did anything happen?"

"I had a long talk with Das. I found out considerable and suspect more."

Weston dropped wearily into a chair.

"You have infinitely more luck than sense," he said.

"Yes, you might call it luck. I've arranged a conference with the local malcontents. I'm going to meet Das and Yatim Imandar at ten o'clock tomorrow morning on neutral ground."

Weston looked up sharply.

"Infinitely more luck," he repeated, "and it isn't even good luck."

"Das wants a sort of parade," Luce continued. "He says I'd better cross the town to the Old Sarai, taking the cliff road that runs just under the bazaar. There should be flags flying from the *ghari* for the crowd to see and be impressed by the symbolism, he says."

Weston vainly tried to squeeze a last drop from the empty bottle. He seemed to be mumbling to himself. Finally he said:

"Ridiculous! You can't do that."

"As a matter of fact, I was going to ask you to take my place in the *ghari* and ride to the Old Sarai at ten, while—"

"I?" Weston arose as though his chair had suddenly grown hot. "But I'm clearing out tomorrow. I've come through torture by promising myself I'd start home the minute you arrived. And now you want me to stay on and attend some useless conference of your concoction, while you go off on some silly errand of your own!"

"Not silly," said Luce. "I want to find out about a cache of smuggled explosives that Yatim Imandar is supposed to have somewhere about town."

"The explosives rumor has been current for the past week. What of it?"

"Simply this," said Luce. "It would have been foolish to mention the matter to Das, because he would have denied it. My idea is to have you ride to the conference, while I go down and dig up the explosives—then confront Das and Imandar before the end of the conference."

"You? My God, Luce!" Weston's face was flushed and his lips were tight

against his teeth. He was struggling to restrain his emotions, yet his voice rose, loud, hoarse. "I've met many fools since I came East first, but none quite as artless and cocksure as you. New to the city, without friends, in a hostile environment, without experience—and you have the audacity to want to uncover an arsenal—alone! Audacity is all right, Luce, only when it's mixed with intelligence. But I'll not be a party to your stupidity! I'll not take orders from you!"

"I'm not trying to give orders," said Luce. "I— Oh, well, forget it. I'll do my sleuthing early and get back by nine-thirty to ride in the one man parade myself. But don't think my scheme is as childish as all that. I know my way around this place, even if I have just arrived. And I'll make a little bet with you that I can dig up that munitions cache before noon tomorrow."

Weston glared a moment, then the tension suddenly went out of his face. His features relaxed into the calm resignation of a sick man, who, after weeks of agonized uncertainty, makes the double discovery that he is dying and that he does not fear death.

"Luce," he said quietly, "I didn't mean to shout. I'm a bit drunk, I imagine. I've been drinking to persuade myself that it's none of my business that you are as green and bungling as Farlington-Steele wanted you to be. It's no use. I'm not an empire builder. I find I value one decent human life above Empire . . ."

"I don't quite get all this," said Luce, smiling tolerantly at the vagaries of a man slightly drunk.

"Don't smile, Luce. This is serious. When Farlington-Steele sent you up here he didn't expect me to take you by the hand and show you around. He expected you to blunder into trouble—just as you're doing. But I'm going to stop you and prevent murder. I'll have to resign, of course, since whatever you do will reveal my unprofessional action." He took another bottle from beside his chair and drew the cork. "Luce, this meeting tomorrow can't be anything but a plot to assassinate you."

Luce's smile vanished, but his blue eyes remained incredulous.

"Assassinate *me?* What's the idea?"

"The chief wants an overt act against Britain and British subjects so that we may have an excuse for military occupation of Paniristan," said Weston. "He sent you here because he thought an inexperienced man would bungle things and hasten the climax. But Farlington-Steele is much too thorough and efficient to leave the matter entirely to chance. He has undoubtedly sent an *agent provocateur* to stir up the local rebels."

"Then you think—"

"Das! Of course! Das is the chief's *agent provocateur!* Who else could it be? And you're the goat—the martyr!" Weston's voice again grew shrill and loud. "It's as plain as day. Yatim Imandar is calm until the arrival of Das. Then talk of violence begins. Das singles out the new political agent for assassination by Imandar—that would explain his plans for flags and the conspicuous ride, the symbolism. An outrage against you will be a public outrage against Britain. Government will act!"

Luce swallowed hard. His cheeks were the color of dead ashes. Speechless, he stared at Weston. In the seconds that crawled by, something of the strange world that lay about them in the darkness, penetrated into the room. On the night wind came wild sounds preluding the Buddhist rites at the lamasery down the road. Above the ominous clashing of cymbals and rumble of drums came the impatient ringing of the *tri-pu*, the blare of copper trumpets and the wail of the mournful thigh bone bugle. The smell of burning tainted the air. Asia, with all its age and disillusionment, had at last touched Luce, cutting sudden furrows in his carefree forehead, pricking his buoyancy, withering his hedonism. He walked slowly to the table beside Weston and poured himself a drink.

Weston was watching him closely, sympathetically. He said:

"Why not leave for the plains with me

tomorrow morning? Go to chief. Have it out with him."

Luce tossed off four fingers of whisky neat.

"Or simply walk out of the whole business," continued Weston. "You don't owe the chief any explanation. He was merely using you as a dummy. Go farther into the hills—tonight. Strike out for a new life. You're entitled to it."

"Dummy!" Luce laughed briefly, but his face did not lose its gravity. He contemplated his empty glass, then turned abruptly to Weston. "If you suddenly found yourself dummy in my place, tomorrow—what would you do?"

"Exactly what I'm advising you to do."

"I wonder," said Luce thoughtfully. "After your long service—in the face of traditions . . ."

"Traditions! What traditions? The white man's burden? The white goods burden, rather! A glorious death for empire means that the coolie's *dhoti* will be made of Lancashire cotton cloth, instead of Russian cloth, or Japanese cloth, or American cloth. Are you going to risk your life deliberately for that rot? You're not. Your face answers that question."

Luce poured another drink and gulped it down. He filled his pipe thoughtfully, then clenched it between his teeth without lighting it. His shoulders were stooped the merest trifle, as though by some psychic transfer of responsibility, the weight of traditions, the growth of empire, and the prestige of a race had suddenly settled upon him. His face was no indication of any decision.

"Well, Luce," said Weston, with paternal calm, "you're not going into a game with the odds stacked against you, are you?"

"I don't know," said Luce. His color had returned. His eyes narrowed. "There are several things I might do, and yet—I want to think it over, maybe sleep on it. I'll let you know in the morning. In the meantime, good night."

"Good night, Luce."

The wailing cry of the thigh bone bugle stabbed the silence of the night.

WHEN a white bearded bearer brought Weston his *chota hazri*, next morning, the political agent sat on the edge of his bed, drank a swallow of scalding tea, then asked—

"Is young Mr. Luce awake yet?"

The servant hesitated a moment before replying. "I don't know, sahib."

"What do you mean? Haven't you taken him his early tea?"

"Yes, sahib. I took him a tray, but he was not in his room."

"He is in the bath, perhaps."

"No, sahib. He is gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, sahib. The sweeper saw him leave. Hearing a noise in the night, the sweeper got up and saw the young sahib leave by a window and run away down the road."

Weston grunted, finished his tea, strode about the bungalow as though he did not believe the servant's story. Then he came back to his room, bathed, cut himself shaving, and sat down to breakfast. He ate practically nothing.

After breakfast there was still no sign of Luce.

At eight-thirty Weston had a double whisky-soda and sent a *chaprassi* to inquire in the bazaars if anything had been seen of Luce. He expected no news of any importance, for he firmly believed that Luce had followed his advice to go farther into the hills, to resume his life of foot loose adventure. Well, that was the best thing for a fellow like that, with his penchant for the bottle and a game of chance. Weston was glad, he told himself, yet he breathed deeply, very much like a sigh, as he began pacing the veranda. He kept close watch on the road that led through town. The sun shone brilliantly, dispelling the vapors of early morning, dissolving shadows in the steep streets of the town. Luminous mauve mists still clung to the depths of the ravines that gaped in endless succession into the distance.

At nine o'clock he called the *syce* and told him to hitch the black horses to the

landau, ready for the trip to the railway. Weston was starting home, Luce or no Luce. He was ill and could delay no longer. He would explain everything in his resignation. He would take the blame for Luce's defection, then resign.

He glanced at his watch, took another look along the road, then went to his room where he supervised his bearer's packing of the last two suitcases.

The *chaprassi* returned from the bazaar with the report that several people had seen the young sahib in the street at a late hour the night previous, but no one knew where he had gone.

Weston sat at his desk and wrote furiously for a few moments, outlining his reasons for his resignation. He was meek at the beginning, blaming himself; then he warmed to his subject and finished by expressing his pleasure and relief at severing connections with a system as soulless in its disregard of human life. He folded the letter, placed it in an envelop which he slipped into his pocket.

Again he glanced at his watch, poured himself another drink, took a volume from the bookcase and began to read. The book was a history of the Sepoy rebellion, and he was reading about the siege of Lucknow.

At 9:34 he stopped reading and walked to the veranda to look down the road again.

Seeing the *syce* ready with the landau in front of the bungalow, Weston was at last forced to answer for himself a question he had been pushing aside all morning: What was he waiting for, anyhow? Was he really hoping against hope that Luce would show up? True, Luce had said he was going to make an investigation of some kind and would return to the bungalow in time to ride ceremoniously to the conference with Das and Imandar. But the conference was for ten o'clock. It was now nearly a quarter of ten. No, Luce was not coming back. Luce had chosen discretion. Or had he? Suppose Luce, after all, had gone back to Das in an effort to straighten out matters, and had been seized. Perhaps he had been killed by Yatim Imandar's fire-eaters. Or perhaps he was being held prisoner, a hostage, until it became apparent what Britain was going to do. And Britain's representative was starting for the plains, to present his resignation. What would happen to Luce then? Or to the two missionaries, the three mining engineers and the fur buyer who made up the white population of Paniristan? What would become of white prestige?

Weston suddenly became conscious of perspiration dripping from his face. He wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief and noted that his hand trembled. He went into the bungalow and poured himself another drink. On the table beside the decanter was the history of the Sepoy rebellion . . .

Gulping down the liquor, he went quickly to the veranda and called to the *syce*.

"Ali!" he shouted. "Get two of our flags, the large ones, and wire them to the lantern brackets. *Jeldi!*"

He climbed into the landau while the *syce* was executing his orders. A moment later he directed:

"To the Old Sarai. Drive by way of the lower road that crosses the town just below the bazaar, along the top of the cliff."

He glanced at his watch. He would be just in time for the rendezvous Luce had made with Das—or with whatever Das had in store.

The carriage rolled down the road, past the terraced lamasery with clustered prayer flags fluttering from its multiple roofs.

Just as he was entering the city gates, another vehicle appeared from behind the lamasery and turned to follow, bumping over the cobbles of the narrow, twisting street, fifty yards behind the political agent. Weston turned his head to look, and noted that the vehicle was a closed *ticca ghari*, a black, box-like carriage which completely concealed its occupants. It was drawn by a chestnut horse many hands larger than the hill ponies usually attached to carriages in Paniristan. When

Weston again faced forward, great beads of sweat stood out on his forehead.

Its flags stiffened in the wind, Weston's carriage turned down toward the Hindu temple erected to Shiva. The other carriage followed.

WESTON'S *syce* once more changed direction, taking the road that ran parallel to the spur on which the town was built. On the left was a retaining wall that marked the edge of the bazaar, alive with people, shuffling, surging, murmuring, weaving, shifting patterns of color. Men stood at the edge of the wall to nod knowingly as the flag bedecked carriage passed. Women stopped weighing purple *brinjals* and scarlet peppers to stare.

Weston did not look at the crowd. He sat stiffly in his seat, held by a chill sense of foreboding, staring ahead as though some mysterious expectancy had opened his eyes upon the future and he was hypnotized by the inevitable. Once he looked to the right, where the road was bounded by a sheer drop of eighty feet, the start of a great ravine that sloped down to a dwarfed stream thousands of feet below. Once he looked behind. The closed black carriage was still following. Perhaps it was a little nearer.

When he had traversed half the length of the bazaar, Weston saw a green carriage dash out from the opposite end of the road, rushing toward him. He was mentally estimating that the two carriages would have just enough room to pass on the narrow road, when the green cab swung half around, halted, blocked the road.

Weston's *syce* reined in, stopped.

The door of the cab swung open. A black haired giant sprang out—a wild eyed hillman, grimacing like a fanatic, dark, powerful, menacing.

Weston's lips involuntarily formed the words "Yatim Imandar."

The giant postured, shouted, thrust his right arm behind him. His teeth flashed. His right arm described an upward arc. A small cylindrical object left his hand.

Weston stood up. His knees dissolved, then froze. An unreal mist passed quickly over him. His face was rigid. The thing he feared had come, was no longer fearful. The slim brown cylinder floated toward him.

The stick of dynamite turned end over end with incongruous laziness. A wisp of smoke trailed. He stared with strange fascination. He did not blink when it struck the soft dirt in the road. The sleek cylinder rolled toward him. With grim calm he saw the fuse burning short, shorter . . .

He squared his shoulders, breathed deeply. Now! No, not yet . . . Why?

A corner of his eye saw the giant hillman reach back into the door of the green cab, saw the hand reappear, clutching dynamite. A fuse sputtered.

The sharp crack of two pistol shots burst on Weston's ears.

He jerked his head to the right, whence came the sound. The black cab that had been following was halted beside him. A man was running from it, revolver in hand. The man was Edward Luce.

The next chaotic second was a jumble of swift, confused impressions.

Weston saw his horses rearing, neighing. He saw his *syce* scramble, screaming, up the wall to the bazaar.

He saw the giant hillman quail at the unexpected opposition from Luce. The menace of Yatim Imandar collapsed at the first two shots, and the agitator, losing his head, tried frantically to climb back into the green cab, half turned in readiness for flight. In his panic the hillman still clung to his smoking dynamite. But his entrance to the cab was blocked. Over his shoulder appeared the snarling, distorted face of the man who called himself Das, the *agent provocateur*.

Das had no desire of being blown up by his own machinations. He fought desperately with the hysterical hillman, trying to make him release the dynamite before it exploded.

Luce, thirty feet away, fired over Imandar's carriage.

The hillman's rout was complete. He

dropped the dynamite, plunged into the cab, bowled over Das. He shouted to his *syce* to drive on. The green cab started.

Then the face of the *agent provocateur* reappeared, hideous with fury. If his puppet failed, he would accomplish his mission himself. He thrust an automatic through the door. He fired.

Luce fell, face forward.

The shot stampeded Imandar's horse. He backed, reared, then bolted. The *syce* abandoned the reins, jumped from the green cab. The frightened horse galloped for the precipice, balked, veered. Shrieks of terror pierced the rattle of wheels and the thunder of hoofs gone mad. The carriage bounded crazily in a cyclone of dust. A wheel smashed against the wall. The horse plunged on. The carriage skidded across the road, careened, tottered, hesitated on the brink of the cliff, then pitched over. Lung bursting cries dwindled to a hopeless wail as the cab dropped eighty feet with its cargo of men and dynamite.

A sickening moment of suspense; then a dull, savage roar shattered the atmosphere. The earth shuddered. A ragged pillar of smoke, dust and wreckage leaped into the air. Débris pattered down. Dust drifted with the wind. Silence settled.

Bewildered, Weston stared at the prone figure of Luce, then at the two sticks of dynamite on the ground, unexploded though their fuses were burned down.

Coming out of his daze, he ran to Luce, seized him under the arms, half carried, half dragged him toward the landau.

Luce opened his eyes.

"Hey—easy on that leg," he mumbled.

"Try to walk," ordered Weston. "Quick. That dynamite—the fuses must be hanging fire."

"No danger," said Luce weakly. "It won't go off. I took out the detonators—Ow! Watch that leg."

As Weston got him into the landau, his *syce* came sliding down the wall from the bazaar, sheepishly mounted his box and slowly drove back to the bungalow.

Weston tore away the crimson cloth from around Luce's left leg. He made a tourniquet of handkerchiefs and applied it above the bullet wound in the youth's thigh.

It took two *burra* pegs in the bungalow to put Luce in condition to explain what had happened.

When he had recovered from the first shock of surprise at what Weston had revealed the night before, Luce said he decided to go ahead with his original plans—modified to meet the new situation. He had gone to the rain game establishment of the Marwari, who, he noted in his informal investigation, seemed quite friendly with Das.

"I acted drunk, practically without rehearsal," said Luce. "I bet like a fool. I played his rain game at big odds, bet on rain in fifteen minutes, bet on his flies and sugar, came back to bet on rain. When the sky cleared, I bet on shooting stars—that there'd be one in five minutes. Of course, I lost; and the Marwari was damn well pleased. I drank a little and began betting on things like the number of teeth in some coolie's head, and the age of the first man that passed us. By the way, speaking of drinking—"

Weston obliged, and Luce gulped down a stiff peg.

"Well, the Marwari's customers had about all gone home," Luce continued. "But as long as I'd keep on betting—and losing—the Marwari was going to keep open. I started betting about people. I bet twenty rupees that the maharajah's next child would be a boy, and I put up my money with the Marwari. I bet the Marwari's wife would have *dahl puri* for dinner next day. The Marwari was having a great time laughing at my bets—and taking my money.

" 'I bet that this man Das didn't wash the caste mark off his forehead when he went to bed tonight,' I said.

" 'Fifty rupees,' said the Marwari.

" 'Done,' I said. 'But how will we find out?'

" 'We can wake him up,' said the Marwari.

"That was my cue. The Marwari knew where Das lived. So I went on, 'I bet Das isn't a true Brahman and hasn't the

sacred lock of hair in the middle of his shaved head. Furthermore, I bet he'll never be able to smuggle in those explosives people talk about.'

" 'People say he has done it already,' said the Marwari.

" 'I'll bet he hasn't,' I said. 'Five hundred rupees he hasn't . . .'

"By the way, I hope the chief will approve an item of five hundred rupees on my expense account, because the Marwari won. He wanted to see the five hundred. I peeled off the notes—they were the last I had, except for some small stuff. Then I wanted to see proof. He led me right to a cellar, chuckling in high glee, and pointed out the case of dynamite. I got rid of the Marwari and came back. The dynamite was rigged up with fuses and fulminating caps—"

"But if you found the cache," interrupted Weston, "why didn't you break up the plot then and there?"

Luce smiled.

"I was sort of an *agent provocateur* myself," he said. "The chief wanted an overt act, so I decided to let the thing go through on schedule. I reduced the odds against us by taking out the detonators and packing a little damp earth around the ends of the fuses. There wasn't much chance of it going off that way."

"But it might have gone off by percussion when it hit the ground—like the rest of it in the *ghari* that went over the cliff."

"That was a possibility," said Luce. "That's why I fired *over* Imander's carriage today. But I noticed that the stuff had been de-sensitized. It smelled of camphor, like the dynamite we had in the mine; they put in some sort of camphorated dope to slow it down so it can be handled more safely. Still, it *might* have exploded anyhow. That was a risk a gambler had to take."

"You took another risk—on my being here," said Weston. "I confess I almost didn't come. I was going down to tender my resignation to the chief. You see, I was afraid I'd convinced you against an onerous, thankless job."

"You were convincing, all right," said Luce. "So damned convincing that I was afraid you'd talked yourself out of the ideas you'd been raised on. That's why you'll find a couple of big Union Jacks inside that black cab I had. I thought you were going to let me down."

THE HOME mail, arrived from Bombay since early morning, lay untouched on the desk of H. Farlington-Steele.

The chief was busy giving orders, keeping the office buzzing with orderly confusion. Telegrams were being received and sent. *Chaprassis* rushed in and out. Secretaries bent over code books. Military men in uniform came and went. There was much to be done, for British troops were being moved into Paniristan "to protect foreign lives and property."

A British political agent had been wounded, and attempts made to blow up another with dynamite, "which," the official *communique* read, "fortunately blew up the assailants themselves." This was ample proof that the maharajah of Paniristan was either unable or unwilling to afford proper protection to Europeans, so the military would establish order for him. The maharajah would probably be deposed and go into gay exile in Paris.

Everything was going as Farlington-Steele had foreseen, yet somewhere in the back of his mind was a vague sense of disappointment. He had made an error in judgment, yet his end had been achieved in spite of it. He got up abruptly, went through a filing cabinet, and extracted a card marked "Pereira, Joseph". Returning to his seat, he studied the card a moment, then slowly tore it to bits.

As he sifted the torn pieces to the floor, there stood before his desk a neat little man with graying temples and wise lines about the corners of his eyes.

"Hello, Weston," said Farlington-Steele. "I thought you'd gone on sick leave."

"I'm on my way to get my boat," said

Weston. "I stopped off to give you a verbal report of what happened, and to say that young Luce is able to hobble around enough to carry on up there—if you leave him on the job. Are you keeping him in Paniristan?"

"I can't say as yet," said Farlington-Steele. "Oh, Simpson—" A secretary appeared. "Make me out a new card for Luce, Edward, acting political agent for Paniristan. The old one seems to have been mislaid."

Farlington-Steele verified the spikes of his mustache with the tips of his first and second fingers.

"When he first came up," Weston said quietly, "I got the same impression of Luce that you did. Plenty of guts but no brains. I think he's proved to us, however, that he has at least a smattering of gray matter. Of course, my opinion isn't worth much, but I think he deserves a place on the next honors list."

"I'll put him on the list," said the chief. "I intended originally to recommend him for decoration—but posthumously."

THE WEST-BOUND MAIL

By

COURTNEY McCURDY

THUNDER of hoofs down the dark dimmed trail
LIKE midnight wardrums—the Westbound mail!
The lean bay's lathered from hoof to head,
A feathered shaft in her flank drips red;
One sleeve of the rider's blouse swings slack—
Four braves rode to meet him who'll never ride back.
A bright spark blooms on the breast of the night—
The relay station's beaconing light—
A stiff legged slide to a slithering stop:
"Help me down . . . Switch the pouches . . . I'm ready to drop.
What's the holdup? Where's Ed? Cashed in, you say?
That's tough! . . . Tie this game arm out of my way;
I'll ride on in his place . . . *Wait relief?* Hell, no!
Gimme a leg up!" The mail must go!

Blanketed fog sifting sleety rain
On a tight lipped group by a blunt nosed plane . . .
It's a hard trek West over Teton Pass,
And the mercury's plummeting down in the glass.
Slim crashed last night; Bob's long past due;
But—"The blizzard ain't brewed that I can't buck through!
Wait till it clears? Hell! . . . She loaded, Joe?
Twist her tail, buddy!" The mail must go!

The BURNISHED TRAIL

A Story of the Wilderness

By PAUL ANNIXTER

WE MUST begin at once with a caption—description in this case being useless. Let it be said first off that old suction sweeper, with whom this story is chiefly concerned was T. Tamanoir, which is the dressed up Sunday name for the South American ant-eater, which is the ant-eater of the ground dwelling persuasion, the giant ant-eater, the ant bear of natural history. Otherwise you might take him, even from his picture, for one of those creatures which Alice met in Wonderland, or worse, for the shape of him is like unto no other creature that runs, hops or crawls.

He stood as high as a full grown mastiff, when he did stand, his shambling body wholly unsymmetrical, rudimentary and prehistoric in appearance. In length he was close to four feet; the whole of him was covered with long, coarse, ancient looking hair, lighter on the back than underneath—unlike other beasts—and of a consistency of fibrous bark or matted grass. Upon the tail it became so long and coarse that it resembled a great plumed fern.

His weird, elongated head was quite expressionless, a tapering snout; and it hung down in front like another tail, so that it was not always obvious whether he was going or coming. Of a brain pan there appeared not a vestige; the small, round and appallingly mild and foolish eyes as well as the tiny ears were set low down on the flexible proboscis, which ended in a diminutive, toothless mouth.

Strangest perhaps of all his points, were his great front paws armed each with four huge, in-turned claws, powerful to the point of deformity, curved and sharp as sickles and— But there, as we said at

the outset, mere measurement and description convey little of the amazing truth of him. Better were it to follow the actions of the beast.

At the time we choose to meddle in his sluggish life, he had just awakened from one of the half dozen calm, torpid sleeps which constitute an ant-eater's day—a dreamless, antediluvian sleep of perfect digestion, no conscience, no imagination, and little or no brain.

T. Tamanoir, emerging from his lone and exclusive burrow beneath the great buttressed roots of a *mora* tree, became acutely conscious of great hunger and a burning thirst. Not having fed for four full hours, he was, in short, starving to death. That last is no joke. It was a fact, with direct bearing. T. Tamanoir had to be so constituted to fill his place in the scheme of things. He was a street cleaner of the jungle, and every twenty-four hours it was his doom to hunt out and devour half his weight in living ants and like it, or die; for that was the toll Nature exacted for the life of such as he, who was an antique, a "leftover", a result rather than an aim.

Back in the steamy beginnings, Nature, obsessed always with the desire to keep cleanliness throughout her realm, had said—

"Let there be ants upon the ground to take care of what the buzzards and vultures miss."

And there were ants upon the ground, and in the ground. And they increased so rapidly that they took care of not only what was dead but a great deal that was living, so that slow moving creatures like the python which got in their path were doomed. And Nature said—

"Let there be a creature in the forest, different from all others, who can keep these ants in check."

And that was T. Tamanoir, forgetful, stupid and slow, and he kept in check all the ants which stayed upon the ground. But myriads of ants took to the trees and dwelt there, and Nature was finally forced to create the lesser climbing ant-eater, T. Tamandua, and the least woolly ant-eater, Cyclothurus. She placed T. Tamandua in the middle jungle, and Cyclothurus in the upper jungle to dwell amid the smallest, slimmest branches, and between them all, by working them overtime and nights and giving each a bottomless appetite, she can just keep the ant pests in control—no more.

The hush of late afternoon lay heavy upon the jungle as T. Tamanoir went shambling through the growing green twilight. Giant trees whose shapes seemed coeval with creation intertwined their writhing limbs, making labyrinths formed of curtain upon curtain of vegetation; branches seemed to stir amid the shadows like octopod arms. Distant evil rustlings, sudden startled paddings, swift patters, snorts or thuds—who knew what sinister things they might imply?

As for T. Tamanoir, he neither knew nor cared. With hairy tail and sad, mild, ludicrous head hanging, little eyes bent earthward, ever earthward, he drifted through the mottled gloom at his trundling, unrythmical, loose rubber gait, that not even the densest, prickliest undergrowth seemed able to check, or the steepest downgrades hasten.

But one had to know him well to see why. He looked and was the most inoffensive creature in all the jungle, but that did not imply that he was unprotected. Truth was, he was a surprise packet of prehistoric kinks, tricks and dodges of flabbergast the fiercest, as all seasoned bush dwellers had come to know.

In the first place, he was immune to poison and insects. His hide was one of the thickest in all Nature, so that it could almost be said of him as of the armadillo, his cousin, that he carried his house on his back. That hide was composed of two coats of hair; the outer long and coarse as grass, the inner short and woolly and so thick that many times Indian arrows had glanced harmlessly from his sides, unable to penetrate it. Beneath that hide were great, slab-like sliding muscles whose slow unyielding strength was unequaled by any other jungle beast of equal size. Speed he had none, but he

could maul and crush like a steam press.

He had his troubles, though; the troubles of one to whom ants must be soup, meat and nuts. Sahara thirsts for one thing, aggravated by the acid of ants and the lack of all vegetables. T. Tamanoir was headed for the river now, to drink before he fed, but searching for ants as he went, always searching, as with the knowledge of one damned to the task. Never hurrying, never slowing, he descended gradually toward the stream which wound like a slow snake out of unknown fastnesses far inland; until the tangled euphorbia trees closed in and marched beside him telling that water was but a hundred yards ahead.

If T. Tamanoir cared for nothing else in the jungle, other things cared still less about him, it appeared. To them all he was just old Tamanoir, dull and toothless, who did not matter at all. But that was not true. He did matter, in general and in particular; but for him the lives of the mightiest would be forfeit to the overwhelming hordes of carnivorous driver ants whose name was legion, whose way was the way of the consuming flame.

Once a little company of labbas, large spotted rodents the size of rabbits, passed him within ten feet, but after one start, paid no heed to him. Again he passed close by another ant bear rummaging in the fernbrake, but took no notice. It is doubtful if either beast saw the other; and even if they had neither would have cared or given a hoot, for nothing so diffusing as curiosity ever entered the dotted line of their existence.

Anon he came to the river, sliding by all spectral and tea-green in the dimming light, its banks and shallows already alive with the first stir of tree frogs, lantern flies and skimming night jars. All about now was the throb and pulse of jungle life awakening to the dark—its day—but all that life was surreptitious; even the larger carnivores; everything but T. Tamanoir, who knew not the meaning of the word. He was unaware, in fact, of most of those others who had come to drink; only moving things close by caught his ineffective eyesight. Those he did see he took no notice of, nor they of him, once they had made certain of his identity.

NEAR the stream bank something flashed and scintillated in the last of the light; something that slid and flowed with a faint clicking sound. At the sight T. Tamanoir jumped suddenly to attention; also he jumped to full speed ahead, a sort of lumbering double shuffle. He had come upon the flowing ribbon, the red rope, the chain of living death made by the ants, the super-ants, the dread driver ants upon whom he lived to war. Moving now at a speed that humped his hairy back like a measuring worm's at every stride, T. Tamanoir followed the deadly ribbon as it wound in and out amid the fernbrake. His long snout was to the ground and as he went his red cylindrical tongue, the strangest in all the animal world, could be seen flickering in and out, literally sweeping up the swarming insects from the ground. That tongue was covered with a sticky mucus to which the ants adhered by the score and by the hundred and were conveyed to his small mouth to be chewed.

For a quarter of an hour he followed that burnished trail as it wound in and out amid the thickets, and in that time three strange things happened which proved beyond all else that could be said the unique place T. Tamanoir held among the wild folk of those parts. An ocelot, that deadly hunting tree cat that kills his prey by dropping upon it from a tree limb, had been lying in wait nearly an hour directly over the trail the ant-eater followed, yet he only hissed softly in chagrin as old Tamanoir passed ten feet beneath his hiding place.

A bit later a great tree boa, nearly twenty feet long, that had been ambushed for twelve hours in a recess beneath some tree roots, waiting for some unwary drinker to pass within strike, had drawn back his deadly head for the death lunge as T. Tamanoir approached. Upon sight of the beast, however, his coils fell

flaccid again, although had it been a fierce peccary or even a stalking jaguar, he might have struck.

And it was the same as he passed slowly between the tall waving reeds of a 'gator run. A great bull mugger which had been lying in the grass but a few feet from the run, evinced the same reluctance to launch an attack and allowed T. Tamanoir to pass on about his business. Why this was, at least, in the case of the boa and the 'gator, who were great lords of their jungle domains, is one of the unfathomable mysteries about these weird creatures which Nature has never chosen to reveal. One answer, however, man's wit can surmise: being bent as he is on Nature's own business, the killing of ants, one of the most lawful of all lawful occasions, the ant-eater doubtless basks to a degree in Nature's own magic and exclusive protection.

There are always those, however, to whom all laws are to be broken, all life taken; and chief among these is the tribe of felines. Numa, the jaguar, acknowledged overlord of all that section of the river bush for many miles around, was one of those who was a law unto himself. He was to the jungle as the lion is to the African veld, and in him was the insufferable conceit that characterizes all the major killers. Overfed and overpampered through the years of his reign, Numa killed now far oftener for small slights to his royal person than for actual food. And, speaking of slights, the tribe of ant-eaters were the original flies in his royal ointment. The ant-eaters, besides denying him the homage of fear or flight like other beasts, showed not even awareness of his kingly existence. Generally, however, the jaguar refrained from drastic action. T. Tamanoir was tough eating when killed, he knew, and the devil of it was to kill him.

This particular evening, however, would not and could not be overlooked. Citizen Tamanoir had tracked the ant caravan to its main fortress, a vast mound of earth that rose round and high as a Hottentot hut where the jungle gave way to a sweep of grass savannah. Pausing for nothing, looking neither to the right nor the left, he had mounted the anthill and straightway attacked its most vulnerable point, the sunbaked dome, worn thin by recent rains. With a few deft strokes of his powerful foreclaws, which were formed expressly for the purpose, T. Tamanoir ripped away the hard, weather beaten cap of the mount, pitched it backward between his hind legs and fell greedily to licking up the insects with his mobile snout and long, flickering tongue.

It so happened that the discarded cap fell directly between a pair of feeding tapirs which had just come out from the shadows of the jungle, and Numa the jaguar, who was making a perfect and finished stalk of the little beasts. With a startled snort the tapirs went charging away amid the grass in one direction while Numa leaped fully four feet in the other, from sheer nerves, alighting with complete loss of temper and dignity. So perfectly did the jaguar, with his tawny yellow coat marked with black rosettes, match the yellow grass, that it was as if a patch of the savannah itself had been flung into the air.

Numa was one of the largest of his dread kind—fully eight feet long from the tip of his mottled tail to the savage red gape of his mouth; large as a lioness and far more dangerous because he was a master climber as well as a stalker. For all the size and menace of him, however, T. Tamanoir, crouched on his anthill, showed scarcely an awareness of his presence; simply went on stolidly licking up the ants that swarmed from the break in the mound with his flypaper of a tongue.

Snarling as all discomfited tyrants snarl, the jaguar came stalking up to the foot of the hill and scowled up at the ant-eater. He got for his pains a shower of spongy earth and ants kicked backward by T. Tamanoir's broad, shovel-like hind foot as the latter burrowed deeper into the fortress. With a low, coughing growl the jaguar upreared, pale eyes glowing like fire, tail lashing back and forth. Exactly

one second later T. Tamanoir was knocked clean off the anthill by one swiping blow of the great cat's forepaw. The impact was terrific, backed by the entire weight of the jaguar's launched body; but beyond bowling him over and over our hero suffered no harm whatever. The situation, however, developed like a brush fire.

The jaguar had taken this toothless back number as an easy mark to sate his fury on at leisure. He got, however, the surprise of his life. With a broken, bleating cry, weird as the beast himself and most grotesquely expressive of rage, T. Tamanoir struggled up to face the spotted death. The whole of him underwent swift metamorphosis. The mild, round little eyes met the surging fury of the jaguar's molten orbs with an expression of reproach and outrage.

Abruptly and with astonishing swiftness for so ungainly a creature, he whirled and struck the killer a bashing, smashing stroke with that bear-like forepaw of his with its twisted sickle claws. Of all the jungle beasts the jaguar is the lightning artist, but swift as he was he had been unable to avoid that right hook. The ant-eater's exclusively Chinese fingernails, each as sharp as a razor and usually reserved for anthills, cut through his gaudy coat like so much paper, leaving a bloody rent down his left shoulder.

T. Tamanoir, however, was a one-punch fighter, one swipe of that powerful forearm being all sufficient as a rule. But as a rule he did not weigh in with jaguars either.

Numa had simply combusted in a flood of molten and fiery rage. He did not so much seem to spring as to have sprung. Two hollow thudding blows resounded—they were the jaguar's full armed strokes upon the ant-eater's ribs—and within the same second T. Tamanoir brought up all sprawling against the base of the anthill. That would have marked the end of the battle and the end of T. Tamanoir had he not been the most invulnerable, save one, of all jungle beasts.

As it was, his long matted coat and the stone-like firmness of his muscles withstood the shock while his hurtling body did what his claws would have taken twenty minutes to do—it broke a sizable hole in the reenforced side of the ant fortress. And it was not a second too soon, either.

Through the opening the ant hordes came swarming to join the others already pouring from the top—huge headed, fierce jawed soldiers, furious to protect their colony, wholly unaware that Nature was flinging them into the breach for once to protect their lifelong enemy.

They swarmed over T. Tamanoir, over the ground, over the surrounding grasses and over the jaguar like red consuming fire. Sputtering and swearing beneath his whiskers Numa paused a moment with the finicalness of all cats to shake himself free of the pests, then turned to finish off the ant-eater. But in that second of interim T. Tamanoir had pulled a vanishing act of his own, and disappeared.

INTO the break in the anthill he had thrust his head and snout, and with three tremendous scoops of all four legs, aided by his powerful tail, he had literally shoveled his way bodily into the spongy heart of the ant city, escaping from beneath the very claws of the enemy. For two or three minutes the jaguar fought ants desperately while he burrowed fiercely on the trail of the quarry. But the ants won shortly—as ants always do. Yowling and hissing in torment and clawing madly at the insects that covered his jaws and neck, the killer suddenly left off and debouched into the scenery as if pursued by all the fiends on cinders.

Deep within the great anthill T. Tamanoir went stolidly on with his tunneling as the sunset drew into dusk and dusk to dark. He had had quite enough upper air experience for a time, thank you. He had to hollow out that entire ant mound, anyhow, and as well begin at the base as at the top. Better, in fact. How and where he got air enough to sustain life eight feet or more under ground is another

of the mysteries no human has yet solved. We do know, however, that his hide was so thick that neither ants nor dirt could adhere or work into it, and that a coarse screen of overlapping hairs kept the insects from entering his nostrils.

Tier after tier of the close packed cells he tore down, devouring the teeming occupants scores at a gulp, pulling the end of his tunnel in after him as he went, so to speak. Imagination reels to think what the inside of him must have been like after an hour or two. Drinking formic acid neat would have been nothing in comparison—the mere kick without the bites—yet out of the compost of ants and grubs, mixed, crushed and chewed, he generated an actual and avid enjoyment.

Meantime the life of the jungle roundabout moved on in its usual nightly channels. Waves of moist heat laden with the fragrance of unknown jungle blooms released by the night cool, eddied about the anthill. Down by the river the reeds began their evening song, the curious rustle they made as the breeze played through them. The air was full of the drowsy churring of night jars, the booming and braying of huge, paint-green frogs and the blood song of mosquitoes. Great noctule bats skimmed and swooped like startled spooks amid the shadows, doing their best to keep down the preponderance of insects.

The forest sounds grew louder. The meat eaters were on the hunt. Once a band of peccaries came rooting and snuffling past the anthill and a prowling panther and a fifteen foot tree boa which had been hidden in the tall grass fled with silent speed before the little killers. Then the mystic yellow moon rose to paint the scene in quicksilver, and the prelude of lesser evening voices suddenly stopped. As its yellow disk tipped the jungle roof the weird night song of a howling monkey boomed forth from a treetop, answered quickly by others in the deeper jungle, until the sound swelled forth from a hundred throats. It was sustained in volume for nearly a minute, filling the dark like a mighty dirge—the night tocsin of the jungle.

Suddenly this song too was cut short, as from the deep bush came a more menacing voice. It was a harsh, subterranean sound between a snarl and a moan, from the throat of Numa the jaguar, and it told all who heard that the jungle lord was not only on the meat trail but touchy of temper this night. For fully three minutes after his dread voice had died away no sounds except those of the insects broke the stillness. Then, a few at a time and growing gradually in volume, the howlers took up their chant again.

It was near dawn when T. Tamanoir next made an appearance above ground. Behind him he left but the hollowed out shell of what had been one of the mightiest cities of the termites. As he broke suddenly into view near the top of the mound he found himself gazing into the eyes of a weird beast which looked like a smaller and if possible, cruder edition of himself. It was in fact his poor relation, T. Tamandua of the treetops. Drawn by the sight and smell of the ants fleeing from both openings of the sacked city, this inveterate sponger had descended from a nearby tree to join the feast. For the space of a minute the two beasts paused to gaze at each other at a distance of six feet, each munching a cropful of ants. Mildly and a bit reproachfully they eyed each other, as if each was put out at being confronted with such a mirthless travesty of himself.

Then T. Tamanoir turned haughtily about and marched heavily off in one direction, while Tamandua waddled off in the other, stumbling drunkenly because a life spent in the treetops rendered him almost helpless upon the ground.

Now it might be supposed that after such a night of feasting, T. Tamanoir would have sought his lone and seclusive burrow with all speed. And there, too, were his wounds to think of. But such is not the lot of one who sits on Nature's sanitation committee. Five hundred yards from the scene of the night's orgy, he came upon another burnished trail of marching ants, and seventy-five yards

farther brought him in view of a new citadel to conquer. And being what he was there was no two ways about that.

Once more did he barge in, cutting and ripping at the walls of the new mound with his armored claws. Then did he really begin to partake of some solid nourishment—the affair of the night standing as mere practise work; and within an hour that anthill, which, by the way, was much bigger than the first, had been reduced by some three million inhabitants, while T. Tamanoir was slowly assuming the proportions of a barrel.

All this, however, was nothing out of the ordinary; it was all in the earthly, and earthy, round of T. Tamanoir's day. But the anthill itself proved a surprise packet, no less.

Tunneling on post haste through the stifling hot depths and getting a bit more fed up than was good for him along the way, T. Tamanoir became suddenly aware of a stranger odor, at once annoying and arresting, permeating the superheated blackness around him. It was not from male, female, or neuter ants—nor yet ant larvae, he knew. It was that of another ant-eater—a female, too, or he was a racehorse. In the same instant he made the realization the spongy earth suddenly gave way beneath him and he fell three feet plump into a roomy excavation that had undoubtedly been engineered by the fair unknown whose presence had advertised her along the upper galleries.

The lady in question had entered the great mound but a few minutes before T. Tamanoir, but from the opposite side, and had been busy ever since honeycombing the interior. The mound, in short, was hers by priority, to say nothing of gender, but at the shower of earth, ants and worse, that deluged her on T. Tamanoir's entrance, through the ceiling, so to speak, she turned tail and fled through one of her own tunnels. T. Tamanoir made an amorous pass at her as she went, but that only hastened her exit.

OUR HERO stopped, sniffed, peered and felt about with his patent pneumatic nose. All at once the business of tunneling out this anthill had become negligible to him—at least, tunneling it out alone. He seemed to cogitate, seemed suddenly to realize that he had blundered at last upon that which he had needed all these years without knowing it. He was, in short, smitten with this ant-eatress he had not yet seen but merely scented in the dark, and knew it.

For unnumbered years—more years than he or any one else had ever actually reckoned, he had been living a lone and ladyless life here, eating ants for two, amid countless other wild things that ran, hopped and flew in pairs. Too many years, by thunder! but it had taken this scent, this contact—collision would be more apt—to bring the matter home to his prehistoric brain, just as it took moving objects to arrest his myopic eyesight. But once an idea took root in his slow brain it was clinched.

T. Tamanoir jumped to attention, threw all four shovels into high, and went scooping downward in pursuit of the unknown flapper, his form not a little resembling the crawl stroke of a swimmer. Into the tunnel he flung, and what followed was the strangest race ever staged, a subterranean marathon which thread needled through and through the teeming ant fortress at a speed of knots that was remarkable. And the ants? Ants for once could go hang so far as T. Tamanoir was concerned.

Whether this female was actually on the eligible list or not, T. Tamanoir did not know. But if not, why did the trail he followed go winding and twisting anywhere and everywhere in that aimless and capricious fashion without seeming to get or caring to get anywhere, much less outside the mound? Encouraging, that, from the word go. And yet each time T. Tamanoir came within hearing, touching distance, the lady put on a burst of speed and pulled the end of the tunnel in after her. Well, let her. Let her have her

own blushing, blandishing way for a time. Even to T. Tamanoir, back number and bachelor that he was, came something of the realization that the greatest joy of anything lies in its anticipation.

Abruptly at last the female ant-eater debouched out of the anthill and meandered away through the tall grass. A scant minute thereafter T. Tamanoir debouched also and followed on, heavy footed. Hair a-jumble, and full of ants and dirt, he looked more than ever a prehistoric beast of the Tertiary Age.

The chase now led through well nigh impenetrable sawgrass peopled by snakes and lizards. Then through a marsh full of nesting boat bills and gallinules and a little family of tapirs who fled before the pair, round piggy backs dodging through the tall papyrus stems. And finally it reached the blotchy shadows of the jungle edge and the dark portal of a burrow beneath a hollow *cecropia* tree. The lady's own exclusive burrow doubtless, for into it she whisked abruptly, and T. Tamanoir barged after.

Swiftly then the situation developed its own drastic conclusion. Deep in the redolent dark within the burrow was a recess, a small boudoir which would admit of only one. Into this the lady ant-eater retired, nor would she issue forth again. Mere coyness, of course, which the visitor disregarded, and took the liberty of introducing himself anew via a series of love digs on the shoulder. As a necker, however, his technique was too Tertiary. Protesting bleats issued from the burrow. Then right in the midst of it all a new and arresting scent wave permeated the thick dark, and some one, doubtless the owner of the scent, sank a pair of ice tongs into the tenderest portion of T. Tamanoir's stern.

Even as the latter swung about, flailing, it dawned on him that that new and annoying odor in the air had not been entirely absent on his entry. In fact, it was prevalent here, or more prevalent, than that of the female. And that meant, ha—what might it not mean? Love nest? Coercion? All this even as he swung about to grip the stranger ant-eater with his own patent meathooks.

The battle that then ensued was a weird, and shocking affair. Most folk—even jungle folk—would never have credited these slow and stolid beasts with anything so active as tempers. Such ones, however, do not know the ant bear, beast of weird extremes. Dull, toothless, far down in the scale of life as he is, there are few more terrible adversaries once he is fully aroused. True, his wrath is sluggish slow, slow as the dim ages from which he is a survival, but once he is touched off it is something strange and terrible to behold.

Out of the burrow mouth waddled the two gallants, arms spread like wrestlers', half upreared, the one inflamed with righteous wrath at the invasion of his sanctuary, the other by the knowledge—derived doubtless from that first brief brush—that the unknown fair within the burrow would, like most ladies of the wild, accept, *ex-officio*, the male who should prove himself the worthiest and fittest.

Would pen could describe that duel as it should be described! The method of it was old fashioned, out of date these hundred thousand years or more; but it was effective, hideously effective. Only during the first few moments did it resemble a battle at all; no stroke and parry, no leaps or lunges. There was a methodical exchange of slashing, bashing strokes with saber-like fore claws. Then they clinched in a lethal embrace like wrestling bears, upraised upon their hind legs.

Thereafter words fail wholly. For nothing further happened. For upward of an hour and a quarter nothing happened! The pair of them simply remained there, locked, crushed together in a grip like love, swaying a bit from time to time, reeling a few paces from one side to the other—that was all. But no, not quite at that. There were the low inarticulate sounds that issued from one or other throat at times; the panting breaths, the straining, swollen muscles of their vast forearms to be seen; and if one looked close, dull sparks of rage that glowed like

red wicks far down in their round golliwog eyes as the minutes passed.

And finally there was something else—something definitely else—after nearly an hour of silent strife, that was. The sight of blood running in slow streams down the matted hair of each warrior's side and trickling away on the ground. A sight to squeeze at the heart, that, in the midst of all that strain and silence. The grim claws of the warriors, those eight, curved four-and-a-half-inch knives had been forced slowly into each other's vitals as they fought, amid torture untellable. Now they were getting in their work, those claws, cutting, ripping, contracting, and one saw it was no mere fight but a murder going on there.

Only death or doomsday could unclamp the terrible, ice tong grip of either fighter now, 'twas plain. Bulldogs were mere nippers compared to these two for hanging on, and their courage would have done lions proud. They had become slowly, sluggishly demented from the first smell of one another. Life mattered no more to either of them now than the ferns and fungus upon which they trod.

From the outset Fate seemed to have backed T. Tamanoir to win at odds. The other ant-eater, though a mighty wrestler in his own bailiwick, was a younger, slimmer beast, and he had discovered early in the game that he was up against fearsome odds. He could not, simply could not, encircle the bulk of T. Tamanoir with anything like the strangle hold with which T. Tamanoir encircled him. For the latter, remember, had been stuffing himself with ants for some eighteen hours and in consequence had hardened and swelled to barrel-like proportions. He scaled in, therefore, a good hundred pounds over his insensate rival. But all that mattered not a whit to the other beast. Never a sponge was tossed aloft in Tamanoir Land.

By the end of an hour both fighters were staggering from sheer exhaustion and loss of blood. Their breathing came as if their hearts were close to breaking, but still they strained and heaved in spooky silence. Blood ran down their sides, but where it thinly trickled on the coat of T. Tamanoir, it clotted the hairy sides of his rival. Still both fighters were as far from giving in as when they started.

Another half hour or thereabouts—and then the end. No show nor dramatics about that, either. There came a low, broken, bleating cry, a deal like the sound a dog makes when it yawns. It came from the other ant-eater. He had put up a great fight, an indomitable battle, but suddenly his long, foolish, tapering head fell forward on T. Tamanoir's shoulder telling that he was done at last. He had been expiring by inches for an hour. Flesh and blood could go on no longer, for T. Tamanoir's long claws had severed his very heart strings. Toppling sidewise, he heaved a long, sad sigh and died.

For a long time, however, T. Tamanoir did not release his interlocked grip. At last, however, he sagged from sheer fatigue and dropped his lifeless burden. He stumbled once, fell, rose again and, reeling from his fearful wounds, reentered the burrow to find the captious cause of it all and prove to her beyond all doubt his worthiness and fitness.

When the pair emerged from the burrow mouth some five minutes later the fallen rival was no longer there. At least, he was no longer to be seen. The spot where he lay had become a seething, faintly snicking, clicking mound of nomad army ants. Drawn by the blood taint in the air and on the ground, one of the vast marching ant armies, billions strong, which patrol every square foot of the jungle floor, had come upon the body and swiftly covered it, nay, filled it from head to foot. Untold myriads of lives had the fallen fighter demanded of this trillion-footed host, now his own body was forfeit in the infinite balance of things.

One hour thereafter nothing remained of his cumbrous carcass but a heap of white and polished bones. Every hair, tendon and drop of blood even, was gone. About that time T. Tamanoir, with his new found mate, was setting up housekeeping in the distant burrow beneath the *mora* tree—lone and exclusive no longer.

A Narrative of the Crusaders

By

HAROLD LAMB

OUT OF the wreckage of the Crusades two units survived. They were the Temple and the Hospital. The soldier monks of the military orders were occupied in the year 1306 in caring for and transporting back over the sea the remnants of the Crusaders who had been driven from the Holy Land.

With the others, the two orders had lost their strongholds east of the island of Cyprus. The Hospital—the Red Cross of that day—kept on with its work of caring for the sick and aiding travelers, while it prepared a new frontier post in the island of Rhodes. (Thereafter, its knights were known as the Knights of Rhodes, until they retreated to Malta, when they became the well known Knights of Malta.)

Not so did the Templars. They had been the transport corps of the Crusades, with the duty of caring for pilgrims, forwarding military units, arranging financing and shipping. They had acted as guides, liaison officers and shock troops—their banner—*Beauséant*—had always had its place in the van of the Christian armies.

The TRIAL *of the* TEMPLARS

These soldier monks had not been numerous enough to wage war on their own account; they had served under the orders of the Crusading princes, and had been sacrificed many times. They had gone into action knowing that they could not retreat and that if they were taken captive, the Moslems would show them no mercy. More than twenty thousand knights of the order had been killed in action.

Now the Holy Land, their *raison d'être,* was lost. The great organization was thrown back into Europe. It had its frontier post in Cyprus, of course, and in Spain its commanderies found occupation against the Moors. And it kept its fleet in readiness.

Meanwhile it had grown vast indeed. European nobles, often with sons in its ranks, had made a practise of willing their property to the Temple.* Matthew of Paris says that it now held 9,000 houses in Christendom. Having served not only as landowners but as bankers for the later Crusades, the Templars now

* Such property, under the law of the time, would otherwise have been forfeited to the Crown, in France and elsewhere.

administered huge amounts of money.

Because the Temple owed allegiance to no lord, and because its members were pledged to take no profit for themselves, the order was entrusted with such treasures. Its fortified commanderies, guarded by the soldier monks, were proof against thieves or robber barons.

Even the Pope could no longer influence its counsels. In France it had a veritable chain of strongholds, with lands and mortgages upon lands uncounted. It was a state within a state. And once the king, Philip the Fair, had run from an unruly mob in Paris to sanctuary within its doors.

Good people shook their heads at sight of this growing wealth, especially in hard times when the burly soldiers of the Temple went about well fed and clad in linens and furs.

Others blamed the Templars for the defeats in the East, and whispered that they had been in league with the Saracens. Because the Templars held their meetings secretly in the hours before dawn, men said idly that they must have something to conceal—no doubt some evil and unholy ritual. But no one was prepared for what came to pass.

Even when De Molay, Master of the Order, was urged by the Papal court to leave the islands of Cyprus and return to Europe, the Templars did not suspect that any action against the order had been planned.

But certain powers had determined to do away with the order, and De Molay never returned to the East.

ON THE thirteenth of October 1307, the royal officers in the governments of France opened sealed orders from the hand of the king, Philip the Fair, and found that they were bidden to arrest all Templars wherever found and hold them to be questioned. In the Paris house Jacques de Molay, Grand Master of the order, was seized.

Philip and his advisors had prepared this step with some care. The wealth of the Temple, the *imperium in imperio* it enjoyed within his own kingdom of France, and its growing political influence placed a rein upon his ambition. As to Philip, men said that he had the face of an angel, the eyes of a falcon, the body of a giant and the heart of a devil. Add that he had the agile brain of a scholar, well versed in the law of his day, and you have a man who is to be dreaded.

He had talked it over with the Pope, Clement V, a weak soul, an invalid, and now a refugee from Rome, at Avignon. The Temple had outgrown its bounds—it must be brought to hand, separated from its possessions, placed under authority. Had not its master, De Molay, refused to join the order to the Hospital and accept as its new master a son of the king of France? Indeed, De Molay had refused. Clement, meditating upon the great possessions of the Temple, agreed to an investigation of the order. The king suggested that it would be better if he should make the first move, and the Pope agreed.

Philip, working with Nogaret, the royal chancellor, and with William of Paris, the Inquisitor of France, had planned more than he chose to confide to Clement. The royal officers had brought to him informers—members of the order who had been punished and cast out for various offenses. From them the king had gleaned the testimony he needed. He would charge the order with the sin of heresy.

Clement, who was making his own plans, did not know of the sealed orders that required the royal officers to interrogate the Templars immediately after their arrest—at need, under torture. And Philip's instructions to his officers contained a full statement of the crimes with which the Templars were to be charged.

". . . For long, upon the statement of persons worthy of trust, made to us, it has been revealed that the brothers of the order of the soldiers of the Temple, hiding the wolf under the semblance of a lamb, and casting despite upon the religion of our faith, are crucifying anew in these days of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and

are heaping upon Him injuries worse than those He endured upon the cross. When, at their initiation into the order, they are presented with His image—what must I say? They deny Him, thrice, and thrice spit upon His face. Following this, stripped of their garments, and bare, they are kissed by him who initiates them, first on the back, then upon the navel, then upon the lips—to the shame of human dignity . . .

"And afterwards they are obliged by the vow they have taken and without dread of offending human law, to indulge themselves, whenever required, in frightful lust . . . These are, with other things, the deeds of that false fellowship—a brotherhood that is mad and given to idol worship. . . ."

The arrest of all the Templars in France upon the same day caused a clamor of amazement. The tidings traveled by horseback from village to village, but before public opinion could take definite shape the royal officers were putting the captives to the question—even before the officers of the inquisition appeared upon the scene. And the questions were those indicated by the king's instructions.

"Did you, at your initiation, deny Christ? Have you knowledge that others did so? All of them? Or the greater part? Or a few? . . . Did you spit upon the cross? Did you see others do so? All of them? Or the greater part? Or a few?"

Monotonously, the long list of questions was read over, to each prisoner, separated from his companions. And then again, when the prisoner was bound upon a wooden frame, with ropes stretching, a little at a time, his wrists and ankles away from his limbs. When the bones were pulled slowly from their sockets, the questions were read again—and again.

Or perhaps the man under the question was seated in a chair, bound fast to the back and arms, while an iron circlet was drawn tight upon his temples and twisted into the skin, against the bone, and the questions were read to him again.

If a man confessed to the charges, he was not put to the torture. Some, who had listened to the screams from the torture chamber, swore to the full confession without further prompting. It was not necessary to take every man in hand, because the confessions already sworn to before the examiners involved all the commanderies in France. Three unnamed Templars denied all the charges, and continued to deny them under torture. Faced with the alternative of torture, few were able to go through the ordeal without swearing that part if not all the charges were true.

So by the swift action of the royal examiners, the king was supplied with the blackest testimony against the order, by the Templars themselves. De Molay's confession was damaging, and it was said that he wrote to the other officers of the order, advising them to swear to the charges.

Public opinion, at first astounded, and then curious, now had the darkest scandal of Christendom to dwell upon. The soldier monks had indeed practised evil rites in their secret meetings—the very guardians of the Sepulchre were servants of Mahound! Little wonder that they had waxed rich and proud when the arts of the Evil One had aided them!

Still, opinion in general could not make certain of the matter. The Templars had many friends, who were angered as well as dismayed. And the Templars in other countries denied the charges to a man. Could it be that these black rites had been confined to France?

Philip wrote to the sovereigns of neighboring countries, demanding that they arrest and question the Templars. Clement, at first, had protested, now he issued in November a bull ordering other princes to arrest the Templars and hold their goods in his name. He sent his cardinals to Paris, to oppose the seizure of the property of the Templars in France by the king. De Molay and Hugh of Pairaud, Visitor of the Order, revoked their confessions. Informed of this, the Pope exerted his authority for the first time.

The Temple was a religious order, and the king's officers had exceeded their au-

thority in putting its members to the question. Philip, meanwhile, had appealed to the University of Paris on this point, and the masters of theology ruled against him. No secular authority had power to try the Templars, a religious order, on a charge of heresy. Only the Pope had authority to judge the affair.

Reluctantly the king and his advisors had to admit the Papal representatives to the accounting of the property of the Templars. For a few months the whole thing hung in the balance. In that time the persecutors of the Templars showed their ingenuity.

A campaign of propaganda was begun, cleverly enough. The text of the confessions somehow came to be circulated among nobles and common people. Disinterested publicists appeared at the Papal court, to speak indignantly against the order. And it was whispered among the people that if the Templars were found to be heretics, no one in their debt need repay any money owed them. The Dominicans, leaders of the inquisition, had long been jealous of the soldier monks, and now used their influence against the captives. Men remembered that they had heard others say that drunkards "drank like Templars." And the houses of prostitutes in Germany—were they not called "Temple houses?"

Details of the inventories of property found in the commanderies were given out to the curious public—so many silver candlesticks and an amber casket found in the chamber of such an officer; a saddle ornamented with silver; so many loads of grain owing to the chapel at Sainte Michele, and not yet paid . . .

ONE William of Plaisians, the mouthpiece of Nogaret, addressed a series of arguments to the Papal court, claiming that the case against the order was already clear, and that it was the duty of the Papal consistory to punish the guilty members. Plaisians' arguments found their way into the hands of the public. It is interesting to look at portions of his summing up.

"This victory is clearly established and indubitable:

"Because they have avowed in so many confessions the notorious truth—

"Because of the public outcry they have raised against themselves—

"And the incontestable testimony of a great and catholic prince—*

"And the verdict of so many catholic pontiffs—"

To bring pressure upon the Pope, the persecutors of the order held what might be called a public demonstration against the Templars at Tours. Philip sent to the Pope seventy-two of the most damaging confessions. In these years of 1308-1309, the confessions had been secured, but the Templars had not been tried because the king and his advisors—unable to try the case themselves—had so frightened the Papal council which should have tried the Templars on the charge of heresy that the Pope shrank from taking the responsibility on himself.

Philip meanwhile carried on secret negotiations with Avignon, and hit upon a compromise. Clement was to name ecclesiastical commissions to hold inquests upon the testimoney. The findings of the commissions were to be presented to a Papal council, to be held in Vienne and at this council the fate of the Templars would be decided. In the interval the property of the order would be administered by royal and papal officers, equally. And the Templars were kept in their cells. Only a dozen members of the order had managed to escape arrest.

So the captives saw a ray of hope. Nine members of the order drew up a defense,

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* Philip the Fair. Plaisians to the contrary, there was no general public feeling against the Templars before Philip's action in arresting them. Plaisians' argument is that their confessions bear out the previous suspicion of the order, and that these confessions render it obligatory for the Pope to condemn them.

Yet his *discours* reveals that the confessions were gleaned by torture. ". . . After the general and *uniform* confessions of *all*, others have *spontaneously* confessed to enormities."

And again " . . . It is not needful to disquiet oneself to know how, or before whom the truth was discovered, provided it be discovered, and less than any other should the pontiff of Rome disquiet himself—he who is bound by no bond."

The situation becomes clear enough when Plaisians, to force the Pope to further action, hints that otherwise the sins of the Papal court at Avignon might be made public, in the same manner as the crimes of the order of the Temple.

which was read before a commission.

"In your presence, reverend Fathers, and commissioners appointed by the sovereign lord pontiff, the undersigned brothers of the order say in response . . .

"They protest that whatever the brothers of the Temple have said to the discredit of the order while they were in prison, constrained by requests and fear, is not to the prejudice of the order—and this they will prove when they are at liberty . . .

"Under terror and fear, lies will be uttered and the truth witheld. The greater part of the brethren are so afflicted by terror, that it should not astonish you that they lie, but rather it should amaze you that any are found to uphold the truth, when one knows the sufferings and the agonies that they endure, and the menaces they undergo daily—while the liars enjoy comfort and liberty, and great promises are made to them daily. It is amazing that more belief is given to the liars who give testimony in the interest of their own bodies than to those who have died under torture to uphold the truth, and to the great majority who undergo the daily ordeals in prison to uphold the truth. . .

"They say that no one has found any brother of the Temple outside of France, who assents to these calumnies. That is because only in France have the calumnies been rewarded. . .

"Whoever enters into the order, pledges four things—to obey, to remain chaste, to remain poor, and to devote all his force to the conquest of the Holy Land of Jerusalem. He is given the honest kiss of peace, and stripped of his old garments and clad in the habit and given the cross which he carries hanging on his breast thereafter . . . And whoever says otherwise, lies.

"That is why the detractors and corrupters . . . have sought out apostates or brothers driven out of the order as sick beasts are driven out of the herd, to concert with them these calumnies and lies which are now falsely fastened upon the brothers and the order.

"The brothers were forced to confess to these crimes because the lord king, deceived by these detractors, informed the lord Pope of all that had passed, and thus the lord king and the lord Pope were tricked by false advice. . .

"The brothers who have confessed such things would willingly revoke their confessions if they dared. So they beg that they be given a hearing, and enough security to permit them to speak the truth without fear."

The response to such defenses of the order was definite and unmistakable. In the province of Sens, the Archbishop Philip of Marigny, a man attached to the royal interests, condemned fifty-four Templars who had revoked their confessions as relapsed heretics. They were carted out at once and burned alive.

With the Pope subservient to them, the royal persecutors had only one obstacle to face before the decision at Vienne—and that was the results of the arrest of the Templars elsewhere than in France. These results had not been to their liking.

IN ITALY the affair had gone well enough. Under instructions from the Papal court the mass of lay brothers had been put to the question and adjudged guilty. Many had been burned, and all property confiscated.

In England at first little attention had been paid to the requests of Philip and Clement for a trial of the order. Then a papal bull—*Pastoralia solia*—obliged Edward to arrest the members of the order, later Clement advised that their testimony be taken under torture. A case was made out against them, and their castles seized in part, but there was no general condemnation.

In Spain the princes were friendly to the order, and saw no advantage in allowing its property to be yielded up to the Papal officers beyond their borders. Besides the Templars there had taken up arms and made ready to defend their castles rather than undergo trial. The

Spanish princes declared the Templars innocent.

Portugal was hostile to the persecutors of the Templars. After interrogation without torture, the order was found guiltless.

In Cyprus a curious thing happened. The Templars were tried twice. The first time, under the king Amalric of Tyre, their friend, they were found guiltless. Then Amalric died, and was succeeded by Henry of Lusignan, an enemy of the order. Henry was instigated by the Pope to try the Templars again, and this time they were convicted of heresy and treason—their property forfeited and many of them burned.

In Germany, no trial was held. The lay princes rallied to the support of the Templars, forcing the Papal legates to withdraw and freeing the captives. When a council assembled to judge them, armed Templars forced their way into the council hall bearing an indignant statement of their innocence. Thereupon the council rendered them public homage.

All this proved to be awkward for the Papal *Curia*. The order, held to be guilty in France, and found guilty in Italy, and censorable in England, was at the same time innocent in Spain, and blameless in Portugal—not guilty and then guilty in Cyprus—and publicly praised in Germany.

Even to the agile minds of the papal jurisconsuls, the trial of the Templars was becoming a complex problem. By now the Pope, under pressure from Philip, had shown himself urgent for the condemnation of the Temple. And this circumstance might prove awkward in the extreme, since the Pope was the only individual in all Christendom entitled to judge the order. So it became needful, in the interest of the Papacy itself, to condemn the order at the approaching council of Vienne. Better for Clement if he had never called the council of Vienne.

But there was another side to the problem; both the Pope and the king had laid their hands on the immense properties of the Temple, wherever possible. And the main object in the thoughts of the *Curia* and the royal court, was the possession of the wealth of the Temple. They would not relinquish *that*.

Such was the situation, when in the autumn of 1311 everybody took the road to Vienne.

Clement traveled thither, with the Papal counselors. Philip moved up to Lyons, and sent to the scene his group of emissaries, among them Nogaret, Marigny, Plaisians. These agents held daily conferences with the Pope and the cardinals at Vienne. And, in spite of the burnings, some two thousand Templars appeared to defend the order.

Public opinion divided into two camps —one party urging the condemnation of the Templars, and the cancellation of all debts owing to the order; the other championing the order and demanding a hearing before the Pope himself. This was refused. Clement would not hear representatives of the Temple.

But the party friendly to the Templars now held the ascendancy in numbers, and demanded whether the prisoners were to be granted defenders in their hearing before the council. Clement referred this important question to the council, for decision. And the answer was that the order must be granted advocates, in its trial.

This decision made matters worse for the persecutors. If defenders appeared in public with the privilege of offering evidence in favor of the prisoners, the prosecution would be deprived of its one prop—the confessions.

For weeks the king's agents traveled back and forth between Philip at Lyons, and Clement at Vienne. Nothing but the suppression of the order and the confiscation of its goods would satisfy Philip. A solution must be found by the Papacy and a solution was found.

Philip went himself to Vienne and talked with the Pope. Two days later Clement announced his decision before the grand commission of the council, and the cardinals. He declared that the order of the Temple was suppressed,

not as a result of trial, but by provision.

So the trial of the Temple was never held. The Pope dissolved it by his own act.

The reasons for this act, given out to the public were: that the order had been criticized; that it had become impotent to aid the Holy Land; and that there was urgent need of a decision in the case so that the property of the Temple might not suffer more by neglect.

This property itself was awarded—after payment of expenses to the king of France and to others—to the Hospital. But after twenty years of litigation and fighting the Hospitallers managed to possess themselves of only a portion of this great bequest. Most of it remained in the hands of those who had seized it in the first place.

Public opinion showed itself hostile to the Pope's act, and Clement tried to justify himself in the bull *Vox in excelsis* of the following spring. In this bull he returned the individual Templars to the jurisdiction of their local tribunals.

By so doing Clement, after refusing the Templars trial before his council, handed them back to the mercy of the judges who had first extorted confessions from them. They were punished in different ways, and so the impression left upon the world at large was that the Templars, at least in France, had been guilty as charged, and this impression endured until modern times. Only the high officers of the order imprisoned at Paris Clement reserved for sentence by three cardinals. The cardinals sentenced them to lifelong imprisonment.

On the parvise of Notre Dame, before an assembled multitude, the sentence was read to the four officers. Two of them heard it in silence, but Charnay and De Molay stepped forward and protested, retracting their confessions in full, and saying that they knew their only guilt had been in helping thus to injure an order that had been blameless.

The twain were taken under guard, and hustled off to the provost of Paris. Before any one could intervene, Philip sent an order to the provost. De Molay and Charnay were led out at night to the island of the palace. There, between the garden of the king and the monastery of the Augustinians, they were burned alive at the stake.

The Templars as an order had been innocent of the charges made against them.*

They had been disgraced, beggared and imprisoned by unmistakable conspiracy. Hundreds of them had been tortured and scores of them burned to death to satisfy the avarice of a prince of Christendom and the policy of a Father of the Church, and the jealousy of the priests, and the greed of the people at large. Unheeded at the time, a wanderer upon the highroads, an exile from the city of Florence, heard of their trial and wrote down a few lines in a curious kind of book that placed the great figures of history in an inferno, or a purgatory, or a paradise at the author's whim.

> I saw the new Pilate, so cruel
> That, unsatiated, and unrighteous
> He carries into the Temple his miser's bags—

So Dante, who was, in his way, a judge of character, summarized the action of the French king, and the whole proceeding against the Templars.

It is curious that Europe should have burned at the stake the last commanders of the Crusaders.

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*For centuries the question of the guilt or innocence of the Templars has been debated bitterly in Europe. Great interests hinged upon the question, which touched the doctrine of Papal infallibility, of the royal rights, of transmontanism, of the Inquisition. Until modern times defenders of the order have had to tread gingerly. For long the general opinion was that the order was guilty—even in Scott's Ivanhoe this belief is reflected. Now the concensus of opinion among scholars is that the Templars were made the scapegoats of others' sins, and were punished far beyond their deserts.

The present writer, who held no brief for or against the order when he first studied the evidence in the trial, believes without equivocation that the order of the Temple was innocent, and its persecutors guilty. He was led to this belief by such circumstances as the following.

1. The only evidence offered against the order was given by informers expelled from the order for misconduct. 2. These informers did not volunteer their evidence, but were sought out by the king and the prosecutors as early as 1305. 3. The worst batch of confessions in France are so similar that they must have been prepared in advance—apparently copied from the king's orders of arrest—for the men under torture to swear to. 4. No secret and blasphemous Rule of the Temple has been unearthed, although interested scholars have searched for it diligently. 5. In the documents of the prosecution there is internal evidence of a case made out in advance, of haste, of pressure against the Pope, and of downright conspiracy at every step.

CORNERED

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

CHAPTER I

THE BRIDGE

HIGH above the darkly gleaming waters of the river soars the Bridge. It joins two famous islands. On the smaller island, south of the towering gray buttresses which are planted on its eternal rocky backbone, elegance and severe beauty flourish. Northward, the brooding shadow of the span straddles an area fated to obscurity.

No stagnation exists here, however. By day, teeming and lusty, life flows through it incessantly. And, too, there is the Barn.

The latter, if visited at certain hours, reveals more concentrated activity than all the other places of business together, for in it two hundred and fifty taxicabs make headquarters, and here five hundred-odd men begin and end their daily labors.

The Barn covers a large section of one entire block. It is a dim cavern of explosive tumult and damp concrete and permanent blue haze. Its front door opens on one street and its rear leads out on another. Alongside the entrance is the office. At the exit is the locker room, and beyond, the restaurant. The latter is a lounging club as well as an eating place, and is known among the five hundred as Dirty John's.

Dirty John's is a long, white tiled room below the street level, so that light enters through a line of windows ceiling-high along one wall. Against the opposite wall the ranges and polished coffee urns are lined, and a lunch counter runs before them. Elsewhere about the sawdust floored room are tables; all, with one exception, of sanitary white enamel. The exception is the long, marble topped refectory table at the end of the room, with wooden benches on either side, a table which is something of an institution. No novice or "schoolboy" ventures to approach this stained and scarred board. It is known as the "Big Shots' Table," and is reserved for the aristocrats of the profession—the big bookers, the veterans, the more amiable among the gorillas, and those of a distinguished past. At shift times there is gathered about it a curious and interesting company, whose fund of anecdote and information forms the folk lore of a great city.

A Novelette of Racketeers and Rum

Martin King had eaten but three times in Dirty John's when he was initiated among the Big Shots. He was that kind of man. He was young; he was big without being massive; his gray eyes sparkled with life, and he had a nose and jaw that awakened both liking and a healthy respect. One felt that he was a fighter, that he would have made a fine soldier or a splendid police officer. And there was a large degree of truth in that impression. Marty King was a fighting man by breed, and never could he forget that a policeman's badge had once been fastened to his breast where the humble token of the hackman now rested.

There were four of them at the table when Marty entered the room.

"Hey, gang!" a voice sang out. "Here comes the hacking fool. What's the good word, Marty?"

"Come on over, big boy. We're saving room for you."

Marty came over, bearing a steaming cup of coffee and a slice of pie. He took his place at the table, deposited the food and tossed on the board a folded sheet of heavy manila paper on which were many figures written in penciled columns. It was the record of his day's work, his book.

"How much today, Marty? Four pounds? Jeez, will you look? Thirty-five rips since seven this morning!"

The gang looked and counted the thirty-five fares, and beheld the twenty dollar total of receipts and, none present having approached this record, the gang marveled. Marty slid into his seat and grinned.

"If you guys went hacking," he said, "maybe you could make a living at this racket."

"A living?" said Nig Jonas, a large faced, swarthy man with a deep voice. "That ain't a living, that's an income!"

"I been hacking since hansom cab days," spoke up an older, red faced man, Pop Madden, "and look what happens to me. Two pounds by noon, and I gets needled by the buckers at the West Terminal Ferry and has to lay up till the wrecker can bring me three new tires. I been out since 6:00 and I got twelve bucks, and this cowboy walks in with a book like that!"

"There ain't no justice, Pop," assured Splints Nelson, a slight, quick tongued

driver. His humorous face wore the look of a professional mourner. "I told you before there ain't no justice."

"No," agreed Pop morosely, "not for a hackman."

They devoured their food, pushed the plates aside, computed the day's mileage and profit and laid out bulging piles of tattered bills in preparation for a visit to the cashier's office. The restaurant was jammed with men similarly engaged, for it was five o'clock, shift time.

On to this scene came an alien figure, a man dressed in neat blue worsted and clean linen whose face was not streaked with perspiration and whose hands carried no deposit of grime beneath the fingernails. He was past youth, but still sound and wiry of body, and he had the tight sort of mouth that can talk much and say as little as it pleases. He sauntered through the crowd, exchanging casual greetings, and came to the Big Shots' table.

"Hello, Macklin," he was hailed. "How's crime these days?"

"Fair, fair. Can't complain."

"Looking for anybody special?" asked Splints Nelson. "I could recommend Nig here. You could make out a good case of wife beating on him."

Tom Macklin smiled and took a place next to Martin King. Tom was a veteran detective from the local precinct station house, and he knew the neighborhood of the Bridge, its avenues and its alleys, as he knew his own home.

"Just dropped in for a social call," he explained. "None of you hustlers got anything to worry over."

Marty King was absorbed in his pie and coffee and he offered no more than a nod to the detective. Macklin had included him in his greeting and he did not intrude further. The other drivers continued to chaff the officer for a time, and then, as they finished their food and completed the preparation of their books, they hastened away one by one.

At length Macklin and King were left alone. On the board before the driver were his empty cup and plate and the neat pile of cash to the amount of the total on the manila card. Yet he made no move to depart.

"How goes it, Marty?" inquired Macklin.

The driver glanced noncommittally at the officer.

"O. K."

"Getting the breaks?"

"I'm making a living."

The detective studied him shrewdly.

"And that's all, eh? Well, if you use your head, you'll probably be better off at that."

"Yeah?" drawled King. "How come you happened to stick to the force so long, Macklin?"

"I guess you know the answer by heart, Marty," said Macklin. "I'm in this job for life, and I'd be lost at anything else." He laughed. "But don't ride me, big boy. I haven't anything against you. You're none of my business. You got a right to be sore, maybe, but not against me especially."

King shrugged wide shoulders.

"No, I suppose not. Let's let it go at that. I ain't sore, you ain't sore, and it's a swell world if you get the jump on the other guy."

Macklin leaned over the table.

"I dropped in particularly to see you this afternoon. I have some news."

King glanced sidewise at the officer.

"Yeah?"

"It's about Trigger Mike Como."

King said nothing, but his nostrils flared slightly.

"Watch your step, if you think it advisable. Mike's mob got you where they wanted, but maybe Mike himself won't be satisfied. There may be further details to your case that he'd like to handle personally."

"What of it? He's got nine years left on a sawbuck stretch. When he gets out of stir I'll be nothing but a bad memory."

"Ah, but that's the point! Mike's on the lam now."

"What?" King almost snarled the word.

"He went over the river wall last night up at the penitentiary and was last sighted headed for the city. They're beating the bush all around that section of the State for him, but I suspect he hopped a fast car and was back here safe in a hideout before dawn. This district's too peaceful. We've been waiting for something to break. Well, it's due now with Trigger Mike back on the job."

Martin King swore with venom and disgust.

"Great guns, I bust up that guy's racket and hang a ten-year sentence on him and they let him get away! I barely escape a load of buckshot and they fall for the kind of frameup his gang pins on me. I damn near broke my neck getting that guy, and for my trouble they tear the badge off me and kick me out of the force!"

"Yes," said Macklin quietly, "but listen, Marty—"

"Listen, hell!" scorned Marty. "I'm through. I'm quits with all of you, from the commissioner down. I'm square with Mike Como now, too. If he braces me with a good proposition I'm thinking twice before turning him down. You can take that back to the Old Man and ask him what he thinks about it, and if he doesn't like it tell him to—"

"Blow it," advised Macklin. "Blow it high. But think that over when you come back to earth, Marty."

"I'm done thinking. Let the department try it for a change." Marty King rose and picked up the money.

"Don't say I didn't act regular and pass the word," said Macklin. "Otherwise you're none of my business, as I told you."

"Now you're talking. Keep that in mind."

And Marty King was gone.

Detective Macklin watched him cross the room and pass out the door. For a moment he stared thoughtfully. Then he shrugged his shoulders, took out a cigar and glanced about the restaurant in search of some one else to talk to.

CHAPTER II

FRAMEUP

MARTIN KING had a grievance. It was a just grievance, and a bitter, rankling one, for Marty was a man of too fixed purpose to be philosophic. Dishonor was no abstraction to him, but a reality as galling as an unhealed scar. And dishonor had been visited upon him, dishonor of the worst kind Fate could devise.

Martin's father before him had been a member of the force. He was a steadfast man who had performed his duty thoroughly, proudly and without self-seeking. His unblemished if undistinguished record had ended with a gun battle in the darkness of a deserted loft, where he had surprised thr e thieves at work and, thinking there were but two, had fallen with a stream of bullets blazing into his unguarded back. He died before help came to him, and the murderers escaped and were never apprehended. He received a posthumous citation for heroism.

Had the killers been found and justice dealt them, young Marty might not have been so strongly influenced by the tragedy. But he was old enough to feel it in all its force, and too young to accomplish anything toward avenging it. A hatred of all criminals was implanted deeply in his heart and it grew and flourished alongside a distrust of the department which had failed to exact the justice that was its reason for existence. These mingling influences bred a habit of independent thought and action, and he came to manhood self-reliant and aggressive, possessed of a shrewd, quick mind and a tendency to rebel at bureaucratic authority.

As soon as he was eligible Marty joined the cops. Despite his doubts of them, he knew that they were the only legitimate mainstays of the law; and besides, he could not forget his father's simple pride in the force. There were many reasons why Marty was destined for the blue uniform and the nightstick, and he did not stop to question or explain them. He

was accepted without hesitation by the examining board, put through a satisfactory training and period of probation, and in time was pounding a beat of his own within sight of the great soaring Bridge.

The usual experiences of the young patrolman came his way—a minor arrest, a summons here, a warning there, a brawl to quell. Then in time, as he studied his district and knew it intimately, there came more serious matters. With the ordinary malefactor Marty was tolerant if firm, but at a hint of professional crime the deeply rooted hatred came to life and moved within him. It quickly became known that Marty King was not amenable to designing "gifts" or friendly overtures. A known criminal felt no comfort under his steady surveillance, and those who wished to remain unknown avoided him sedulously.

Such was the state of affairs when Mike Como came to Marty's attention.

Mike was a product of the city and, more particularly, of that section of the city in the shadow of the Bridge. Very early he learned how easy, if risky, it is to live by one's wits. He had a talent for leadership and organization and he gathered about him a clan of hustlers who carried out his nefarious schemes with ruthless efficiency. He ran alcohol, speculated in drugs, protected gambling games for a fee that was more properly blackmail, hired out his bruisers to the highest bidder in labor disputes, and offered the services of his gang to politicians willing to descend to cutthroat electioneering. In his chosen field he was a success and his name carried weight in the underworld of the city.

The activities of Como's mob were too widespread for an observant policeman to miss them. Marty King quickly became cognizant of their affairs. It is one thing, however, for an officer of the law to know that evil is being done, and quite another to apprehend those responsible. No matter how public the crimes of the gang, no witnesses could ever be found to testify against them in a courtroom. Marty learned that peculiar aspect of modern crime very quickly. He also learned that Mike Como considered his policing efforts annoying and even in bad taste, and that if they continued Marty might suffer unpleasant punishment at the hands of persons ostensibly unknown.

A personal feud grew out of the clash of the policeman and the racketeer. Threats only caused Marty to set his jaw a little more grimly and work the harder to get Como. He sought no aid from his superiors, knowing that they had tried and failed before him; and he did not confine his activities to working hours.

A climax of some kind was inevitable, and it came dramatically one day, ushered in with the murder of an unknown whose body was found on Marginal Street on the waterfront. Circumstances indicated that the victim had been killed elsewhere and thrown from an automobile, and it was concluded that the murderers were gangsters who had taken a rival for a ride. Marty, working on the case, found no more clues than did the homicide squad experts, but he performed a little private sleuthing in the neighborhood and, picking up one rumor here and another there, placed the guilt to his own satisfaction at the feet of Trigger Mike Como.

Soon thereafter Marty selected the man he judged to be the weakest sister in the mob, trailed him till he had the fellow alone, and spirited him to the station house on a charge of vagrancy. With the aid of the detectives he worked on the frightened prisoner until in a state of collapse from terror the fellow told all he knew. It was enough to support the arrest and trial of the gang leader as an accessory before the fact. The jury, since the actual killers could not be found, hesitated at a first degree murder conviction, but agreed on a verdict of manslaughter in the first degree. The court sentenced Como to the State penitentiary for a term of ten to twenty years.

Not long after that Marty King was halted on the street while coming off his beat by a taxi driver whose face was

vaguely familiar. The fellow, a nondescript native of the section, intimated that he could impart news of great value. He seemed oppressed with fear of being observed, and requested that King meet him later out of uniform. Marty kept the rendezvous, and the hackman drove him to a dingy speakeasy in the middle of one of the long sordid blocks near the river front. King gathered that he would there discover one of the gunmen who had performed the killing for the instigation of which Mike Como was in prison.

They occupied a table in the rear room of the dive and waited. The informer, a thin faced fellow with close set eyes and colorless, bleached looking brows, was plainly obsessed with fear. King studied him, wondering how so craven a creature could find nerve to go through with it. Marty had no way of knowing yet that the hackman was purely a decoy, acting not in spite of Trigger Mike, but in terrified pursuit of his orders.

Marty's first suspicion came when a peculiar, frozen expression fixed on the man's features. Marty snapped a question at him. The fellow made no reply; he stared with burning eyes directly at the policeman. And then a sudden crashing blankness descended on Marty King from behind, and the hackman, the speakeasy and the entire world were wiped out on the instant.

Marty awakened in his own station house, where they placed him in a cell. He wore a bandage and his head ached; and there was a sharp odor of alcohol in his nostrils. He demanded the reason for these strange circumstances and was quietly and coldly informed that he was under arrest on a charge of murder. He could not believe his ears. Even when he was told all the details they seemed too fantastic for credence.

He had been found lying senseless in the back room of the speakeasy, with a dead man and a bottle of whisky nearby. The room was partially wrecked, as if a terrific fight had occurred. Marty's service pistol was discovered close beside him, two chambers fired. The dead man bore two wounds, both fatal. All witnesses, if any, had fled. The proprietor declared that he had been in the front room at the start of the affray and that he had rushed out into the street in search of a policeman without pausing to investigate. On his return only King and the dead man occupied the premises. The proprietor disclaimed acquaintance with either, and further, maintained complete ignorance of the identities of any of the patrons who had witnessed the crime. His story was scant indeed, but it managed to suggest that Marty had attacked the victim in a drunken rage, had struggled with him and had shot him to death just before dropping unconscious from a blow received in the battle.

The dead man provided a mystery that baffled Marty and the police alike. He was a large, powerfully built man, identified as a native of a northern section of the city, a character of shady repute but with no official criminal record. Marty failed to recognize him, even when brought to the morgue to view the body.

THE DAYS that followed were a nightmare. Marty raged and fought the charge and demanded that Como's mob be sought out and questioned. This was done. It proved surprisingly easy. Every known member of the gang was located instantly, as if they had anticipated the curiosity of the police and made themselves available. And every man had an ironclad alibi. Not one could be found who was not miles away from the scene of the murder at the time—on the testimony of any number of witnesses. The department abandoned that line of investigation.

Marty's record sustained his own story and eventually the charge of murder was dropped. The district attorney did not even attempt to bring it before the grand jury. But the cloud was not thereby lifted from Marty's name. The odor of liquor on him at the time of his arrest was the strongest count against him. He was discharged from the force, dishonorably,

and forced to surrender his badge and pistol. Whether or not he was guilty of murder, the trial commissioner concluded that he had been grossly negligent in his duty.

Though he may be out of uniform, a policeman is never considered to be off duty, and it is mandatory that he carry his pistol and be prepared to preserve public peace at all times. Marty had visited a speakeasy, had apparently been intoxicated, and had been present at the scene of a murder in a condition of helplessness. No argument could be offered to mitigate these offenses. He was cast out of the force as one who had brought dishonor to its name.

Martin King was no man to take such a blow supinely. A blind rage possessed him for days after his defeat. He recklessly bought a pistol across the State line and roved the old neighborhood in search of those who had betrayed him; the mob, the thin faced unknown who had lured him to the trap and the patrons of the speakeasy who had witnessed the murder. He found no one. Strangely, many familiar faces were absent from the neighborhood those days. And whether because of Mike Como's absence or because of reasons of strategy, that section of the town enjoyed an interval of peace such as it had not known in years.

Marty was forced in time to abandon his search and find a job. Knowing no trade and having interest in but one profession, he chose to drive a taxicab. He anticipated trouble in securing a license, but his record was ignored and he was issued a book, badge and hack card without comment. He brought these with him to the Barn and was promptly put to work. From the first he was successful, for he knew the town and he worked ten or eleven hours each day. He sought to lose himself in exhaustion. He believed not for a second that the case of ex-patrolman Martin King was closed, but he had no other choice of action now.

By a process of simple reasoning, Marty was able to solve to his own satisfaction the murder in the speakeasy. This did not come to him at once, but the passage of time made it more and more tragically obvious. The affair had been delicately and beautifully planned. The dead man had been lured to the place even as had Marty. Doubtless he was a rival whom they wished to destroy. The taxi driver was a hanger on of the mob, an individual terrified into acquiescence who had either fled or been spirited off after the killing. He had probably been rewarded with enough money to take him far away, and the cash had been accompanied with instructions never to return. He probably was ordered to bring Patrolman King to the dive, and nothing more revealed to him.

King then had been blackjacked, the other man shot, and the few remaining patrons driven from the place with impressive warnings to silence—warnings the gang knew they would not ignore. Wrecking the place, the killers had departed, with a final admonition to the owner. And the latter, deeply impressed by such a demonstration of ruthlessness, kept his tongue about what he knew.

The elaborateness of the plot was not wasted. Simply to kill Marty outright would have brought down on the mob the wrath of the police, who can wink at many things, but in self-defense can not ignore a blow at their ranks. To ruin Marty was revenge of a more subtle order.

And when news of the ruination was brought to a swarthy little man in a grim stone building many miles northward in the State, the little man grinned with satisfaction and turned over in his mind the perfect plan he had devised to take him over the high river wall, and beyond, to freedom and the fruition of certain matters left uncompleted in the shadow of the soaring Bridge.

CHAPTER III

ARMISTICE

WALKING homeward that late fall afternoon, the darkening streets of the neighborhood seemed to Marty King already to possess a different aspect. In the shadows of the

tenement doorways a sinister presence lurked, and in the eyes of the tawdry natives who hurried along the streets there was a dim apprehension. A pall had fallen on the section, and a reprieve ended.

Marty found it difficult to analyze the situation or, indeed, to make certain of his own reactions to it. Como might return to his old haunts, but never again could he reign unchallenged as before. Though he retained all his power, he was a fugitive whose person the merest patrolman need no longer regard as inviolate. He would be forced to hide, to adopt disguises and assumed names. For a time, perhaps, he could evade capture, but eventually all his stratagems would fail, and he would go back to the big house behind the high wall. If Trigger Mike returned to the neighborhood now it would be for either of two purposes, Marty knew: to exact in full the revenge his venomous heart demanded, or to amass a quick fortune for flight to other and safer lands. The latter would be far the wiser, but—strange is the way of the criminal.

Marty King occupied a furnished room in a flat dwelling close by an avenue where the L roared by through night and day. His was a hall bedroom rented from an old couple who had known Marty's father before him. He had removed no more than his hat and coat, on arriving home, when there came a knock on the door and a gentle old voice called his name.

"Marty, did I hear you come in?"

Marty hastened to admit his landlady, Mrs. Cavanaugh.

"It was me you heard and nobody else," he told her, imitating her quaint manner of speech. "And how is the Lady Cavanaugh this evening?"

"I'm fine, boy. Fine as you look yourself, indeed, and you're always looking well." Standing in the doorway she gave him a glance of admiration and affection. "I just knocked on your door to tell you that Rose has been calling you the last hour. She seemed very wishful to talk to you, and you're to call her back again immediately if you're home before she goes on for dinner at the restaurant."

Marty looked at the alarm clock ticking on the dresser.

"Too late now. She say to call her after dinner?"

"If that's the best you can do!" The old lady's voice dropped confidentially. "If I were you, boy, I'd take myself right around to the restaurant. It isn't every young lad has the likes of Rose Shannon calling them up, I'll tell you that."

Marty grinned at her.

"There's truth in that," he said. "Maybe I will, later. Thanks for telling me."

" 'Tis no trouble," assured Mrs. Cavanaugh. "I've little else to do, indeed."

And little trouble it was, to be sure, for the old lady's fondest if unspoken wish was that these two children of old neighbors, Rose and Marty, might come together in happy young love.

Marty quickly washed and changed his clothes when the old lady had gone, and was soon out of the house again. He made no attempt to call up Rose Shannon. Rose was cashier at a busy restaurant and conversation was impossible while she was on duty during the dinner hour. Nor was Marty eager to talk to Rose. His disgrace had erected a wall between them, one his pride would not permit him to surmount. The very loyalty and faith she offered him made it seem the higher. Martin King was a proud young warrior, too proud to come to his lady with tarnished banners.

Marty stalked through the dusky streets of the city on a quest. It was a quest conducted with subtle steps and cunning measures. It took him first to a poolroom where behind green painted windows a crowd of young men lounged and gossiped and watched the players at the tables. Marty nodded casual greeting to several of them and bought a cigar at the counter where the proprietor was seated.

"Well, how goes it, Marty?" the latter inquired genially.

"Pretty fair, Sam. How are the goats treating you these days?"

"Great, boy. I dragged down a ten-to-one shot on the fifth session at Latonia this afternoon. Got another tomorrow. Want some of it?"

"No, thanks. My money is poison with the gee-gees." Marty lighted the cigar and blew a cloud of smoke into the already hazy atmosphere. "You hear the latest about Mike Como, Sam?"

The poolroom man looked away and chewed on his own cigar.

"Yes."

Marty, too, looked away, and he leaned on the counter.

"He was heading for town, by the last accounts I heard," said Marty, with no more than superficial interest in his tone. "What's the dope that's drifting around?"

"I ain't heard a word," said the proprietor blandly.

Marty said nothing. There was a moment's silence.

"Straight goods, kid," the proprietor added. "On the up and up."

"That's all right," assured Marty. "I was just wondering. You know—"

"Sure. I know."

"Well, be seeing you, Sam." Marty moved off.

"Yeah. Drop in, Marty."

Marty departed into the night.

Shortly Marty was buying another cigar in a small room in the rear of a bicycle repair shop, a room with a steel door, a long bar and many bottles for decoration. A stout, blond mustached man in a soiled apron sold him the cigar and poured two short beers on the house.

"What's going around about Trigger Mike?" inquired Marty, following the usual amenities.

The man eyed him with raised eyebrows.

"I should know anything about Mike Como? Me, I got tin ears where he is concerned!"

Marty grinned.

"That's O. K. with me, Pete. Natural curiosity, you know—"

"Only too natural," agreed the bartender.

"But I'm working for a different boss now," reminded Marty.

"Yes?" said the other skeptically. "Let me tell you something I learned in this town. Once a cop, always a cop. Once a cop, always a cop—unless maybe a crook!"

"Who knows?" drawled Marty, tilting one eyebrow.

"I give two cents to know nothing." The man swiped the bar with a dripping rag. "Honest, Marty, if I know I don't think I tell you. I speak to you straight."

"Well, no one would ever hold it against you, Pete." Marty drained the creamy beer from the small glass and conversed of other things.

Marty visited a cigar store, where he paused to watch the pinochle in the back room and to chat a few minutes with the owner; a musty old drug store, where knowing patrons walked straight back into the prescription department and were thus afforded privacy during certain transactions; a garage, before which idlers lounged on oil polished benches and within which, in a room far back on the second floor, a tense poker game held perpetual session.

He dined in a lunch wagon, perched on a teetering stool, and gossiped with the counterman about many things. He gave good evening to the old lady who had been peddling newspapers at a stand beneath the L station stairs for twenty years. He paused at the doorway of the fire house and passed the time of day with the neatly uniformed men who waited there in eternal indolence for the sudden, grim clangor of the alarm bell. He patrolled the neighborhood, and everywhere he went he asked, so very casually, the same question. And everywhere, with differing degrees of evasiveness, he received the same answer.

AT 9:30 Marty abandoned the quest. Either nothing was known of Mike Como's whereabouts and plans, or fear closed the mouths of those who had learned anything. Marty hailed a taxi and had him-

self conveyed to a corner where cross-town bus and street car lines intersected the subway. It was a corner that never slept, and the large restaurant two doors from a subway exit was strategically situated. It was roomy, cheerfully decorated in oaken panels and hunting prints, and it served good food. Day and night the doors were open, and the neighborhood did not neglect it.

Marty stopped at the cashier's desk just within the entrance. A girl presided, a girl with large, calm brown eyes and brown hair, with pleasant features and the exquisite, irresistible coloring that nature endows upon women during at least one unshadowed interval in youth. The girl looked up as Marty stopped and instantly smiled.

"I've been watching for you," she said. "I've just balanced up."

"Busy day?" said Marty. Far and deep hidden, there was a hunger in his eyes as he looked at her.

"Oh, fair. Luden's is always busy. Wait till I get my hat and tell Max I'm going and you can walk to the bank with me."

The girl wrapped a package of bills in an old newspaper, thrust a bag of silver in her purse and passed among the tables to where Max Luden sat in portly comfort over his after-dinner coffee. He nodded as she spoke to him, and rose to take her place at the desk. Presently she was ready and she proceeded through the door Marty held open. The air was brisk, and she breathed deeply as she walked along with Marty at her side.

"I love this time of year," she said. "It's so calm, and yet it's so vital. It makes me want to do things and go places and accomplish something."

"Yes," said Marty.

She glanced at him.

"Why all the enthusiasm?" she inquired.

"Oh—nothing!"

She slipped her arm in his and did not insist. They walked for a time in silence.

"What was up this afternoon, Rose?" he asked at length.

"My calling you?"

"Yes."

There was a trace of constraint in her manner.

"Well, I wanted you to ask me out to the movies or some place tonight. That was the first reason. The second was that I just wanted to talk to you. The third, well—"

"Go on."

"Well, that I was worried."

He said nothing.

"There was some talk in Luden's today about Mike Como's escape," she went on. "I wondered if you had heard."

"Yes, Tom Macklin came to the Barn and told me."

"I see. What are you going to do?"

"Do? Nothing."

"But Marty—won't you have to do something?"

He laughed shortly.

"Of course not. There's nothing to be done. That's all over now. Mike will have his hands full keeping under cover; he'll have no time for me."

But Rose Shannon had heard intimations to the contrary in Luden's that afternoon.

"Marty," she said earnestly, "why don't you go away? For a time, anyway."

There was an uncompromising look on his face.

"Nothing doing. Rose, they licked me here, but they're not going to kick me out of town. I can still take care of myself."

She looked at him and despaired of convincing him. His thin mouth, so wide and strong, which could smile so readily, or draw to such a straight, grim line, told her how unflinching was his purpose.

"Are you going to mix in this affair at all?" she asked.

"Maybe. I can't say. I'm not looking for trouble."

She pressed him no further. They deposited the cash at the bank, dropping it in the patent receiver in the street wall. They went to the movies and sat silent through a picture of desert romance. Neither enjoyed it very much, but each

pretended interest in the antics of the shadows on the screen. They perched together at a soda counter after the show and talked of everyday things. Finally they walked to her home, a simple apartment dwelling in a peaceful block, and paused at the entrance, equally uncomfortable and equally uncertain what to do about it.

"Won't I see you sooner next time, Marty?" she asked. "Without having to call you up?"

Unseen in the shadows his face flushed a little.

"I don't know. I'll give you a ring."

"When? Doing anything tomorrow night?"

He hesitated.

"I may. If not—"

"Well, if you're not busy come and call for me at the restaurant." She reached out and pressed his hand. "It was good to see you. Night, Marty."

"Good night, Rose."

There was a thin line of unhappiness on Martin King's brow as he walked to his room through the dark streets. An hour or two with Rose Shannon usually graved it there. It was in her presence that he felt most deeply the ignominy of his position. It had been in her presence that he had felt his most exultant pride, the day he had donned the blue of the force, and it was when with her that his dreams and ambitions had seemed most certain of fulfilment. Without definite word, or even thought, there had been a commitment between them. The disaster that had brought an end so abruptly to his career had halted that commitment also. Marty retired within himself, remained away from her, and by silence and by implication denied her permission to discuss the matter. Gently, with the penetrating insight of affection, she strove to win him back, to persuade him of the needlessness of maintaining so grim a pride before her. But to no avail.

Quietly Marty mounted the old stairs of the house that was his home. He crossed the carpeted landing and let himself into the room, locking the door after him. He crossed the floor, avoiding the iron bed, and reached for the dangling chain of the electric light that hung from the ceiling. But even as he drew on it to ignite the bulb, his gaze caught a small patch of fire that glowed like a jungle eye over against the wall between the windows. Every muscle of Marty's body jerked to instant tension, and a chill mounted his spine so that the small hairs at the back of his neck came erect. His free hand moved slowly to the skeleton leather holster attached to the rear of his waist belt, and came away with his pistol in its grip.

"Put that gun away and turn on the light," said a throaty voice freighted with irony. There was a precision of accent in the words that bespoke a tongue native to another language. "You have no need of the gun, Marty King."

Marty snapped on the light. Seated comfortably in a chair, knees crossed, in his right hand a long ivory holder containing a cigaret, was Trigger Mike Como. He was well dressed and at ease, and a barber and manicurist had served him with expert attention. There was a sleek grin on his broad, short face.

"I am come to pay a visit to my enemy," said Trigger Mike. "Won't you sit down? Perhaps there is much of which we can talk, you and me, Marty King."

CHAPTER IV

SUSPICION

MARTY'S blood pounded through his veins with the force of the berserk anger his first fear had inspired. His face was set in ugly lines. He beheld his visitor for a space and slowly returned the pistol to its holster. He glanced about the room. Nothing was disturbed; they were alone. The bed, with its smooth white counterpane, the dresser, on its top a scattering of personal belongings, the closet, with door ajar, the faded lithographs on the wall—these familiar things were calming to his blood. Marty seated himself on the edge

of the bed and fixed Trigger Mike with his gaze.

"Well?" he said.

Como stirred comfortably in the chair and blew a thin cloud of smoke into the air.

"How are you making out at this taxi driving, Marty King?"

"All right."

"As well as one might, say, pounding the pavements in uniform?"

"I have no kick."

"I see. You wish to assure me that you are as happy as before. I am very glad. I heard you got a very raw deal from the department."

"That made you sore, didn't it, wop?" asked Marty.

The olive eyelids narrowed ever so slightly.

"Oh, no," Como protested. "Nothing ever make me very sore. I take care of that, you see. I make sure beforehand."

"You fell down hard when you took a ten-year rap for murder, Como."

"You think so? I do not look like one who is very much broken up about it, do I?"

"Not now. Not this minute. But wait till the newest rookie cop gets a flash of your mug. Wait till you think you're smart enough to get away with a personal appearance on the street. You'll go back up the river so fast the skin'll be worn off your elbows."

"It is a bad thing," Como observed judiciously, "to take a bright young fellow and make a cop of him. It—what would you say?—retards his growth. No brains, no head at all. Look you here, Marty King. I am out, I am free. I am an escaped convict; any one can arrest me. Well, listen closely. I will be arrested. All the papers will tell in a few days how I was captured after a big battle, and how I was brought under close guard back to the big house up the river. I will be placed in solitary; no one will be allowed to see me. I will stay there many days. And then the papers one morning will tell how I am completely innocent of the crime for which I was sent away. They will give me a complete pardon, and I will be set completely free. This, Marty King, is what you will see happen."

The short figure leaned closer for emphasis.

"And listen most closely to this. All the time I am in solitary up there, if you want to see me you will find me in a certain house in this town where I will have every comfort I wish to find for myself."

"What do you mean, I'll see you in town?"

"Did you ever hear of a double, Marty King?"

"Yes."

"There is one all ready. He is the one who will be arrested after the big battle. He is the one who will be cruelly beaten by the police. He is the one who will be placed where no one can see him. And he is the one who will go out of the prison late at night when no one is around, carrying my pardon."

"Wop, you're nuts! You hear me—nuts!"

Como smiled and sat back.

"We will see."

"Why the hell did you take to the bush now if you got that up your sleeve?"

"For one good reason. While I was up there I was more helpless than they knew. Now I am not up there; I am here where I can get things done as I want them. They did not fear me in prison. Well, Marty King, they are afraid of me now. I am the one to make them so afraid that they do what I tell them from the street cleaners on up!"

There was a moment's silence, in which the harsh vibration of that last sentence echoed in the room. There had come a fire to Mike Como's eyes, and it dimmed slowly. Marty watched him.

"What's to stop me, Trigger Mike, from pulling this rod on you and turning you in tonight?" he asked.

The irony returned to the other's throaty tone.

"I wonder. I have already asked myself that question. My hands are held high, and besides I have no gun anyway. What is to stop you?"

Even for his own satisfaction Marty could not find an answer to that question. Characteristically, his nostrils twitched slightly, flaring under emotion as the hackles of a fighting bird rise in anger.

"Nothing could stop me, if I felt like pulling you in, Como. But I'm not drawing pay from the city any more. So far as I'm concerned, you and I are square. You just keep out of my way and I'll do the same for you."

"I am glad to hear so much good sense." Mike Como quenched the cigaret by stepping on it. He placed another in the ivory holder and lighted it. "But it is not necessary for us to be like a cat and a dog spitting and snarling at each other. Besides, it is not safe."

Again Mike Como leaned forward slightly, confidentially.

"Marty King, I could use you. I am a quick judge of men. You are a good man, and you are not my enemy any more. You are sore at the cops, for whom I have no love either. You throw in with me, and I will give you the chance to make much money. What do you say?"

A phrase echoed in Marty's head. Once a cop, always a cop—unless maybe a crook. No idle phrase. Rather, a starkly prophetic one.

"I do not need to tell you what my influence could do," Como went on. "You know. Right now I must stay under cover. There are many rackets, and I have my finger in most of them. I can use a man with brains and nerve, especially a man who is supposed to be my enemy. You would continue to tell people unpleasant things about me, and no one will be the wiser. What do you say?"

Marty got up and paced a turn about the room, his eyes smoldering beneath dark brows. He halted before Como.

"Mike, I hate your guts. That's the answer. I couldn't work for you if you took to building churches. You leave me alone, and maybe I'll leave you alone. If it's a choice of being a friend of yours, or an enemy—I'll be an enemy. Now beat it. Get out!"

Como did not move. There was no expression on his broad face, beyond a contraction of the little muscles around the eyes. Then a lip lifted slowly.

"Be careful what you say, Marty King. I am patient because you are a dog who is whipped. But I—"

"Will you get out or do you want to be thrown out?"

"But I may put you on the spot yet!"

Marty's hand moved. Como made a gesture to detain him.

"If you look behind you, Marty King, you will see the reason why you will not throw me out."

Quickly Marty sidestepped and turned. The closet door swung gently open. Standing within, leaning against the door jamb and hefting a small black automatic, there was a man. He was young, slender, mustached and dark of skin. He was smiling quietly.

"My cousin Frankie Ruffo," said Trigger Mike. "I would advise carefully to look for him first before you try to do anything to me any time." He laughed and got up. "We will go now, after enjoying your nice hospitality. I will think over the things you have said to me, carefully. Very carefully."

Frankie Ruffo turned the key in the lock and held the door open for him. Trigger Mike Como departed leisurely without a backward glance. His bodyguard gave a smirk of evil humor and closed the door softly behind him.

MARTY was on the street with his cab promptly at 7:00 next morning. He had no intention of letting Mike Como's presence in the neighborhood interfere with his new livelihood. One of the garage hands, a young shifter to whom Marty paid a dollar a week, had Marty's cab ready at the curb as usual when he arrived, watered and gassed and oiled. Marty proceeded immediately to his customary morning stand close by Max Luden's restaurant.

Marty had barely shut off the motor on his arrival when a fare climbed inside the

cab. The passenger was a young man who had an unusual amount of business to transact for such an hour. Oddly, too, it was all within the vague confines of the neighborhood. They stopped at dwellings, at restaurants and at shops. Three times Marty crossed the approach to the great bridge.

An hour later the cab was discharged at the starting point, with the clock registering $5.20. The young man paid the sum cheerfully and added an extra dollar for a tip. Marty pocketed the money in a slight daze of gratification. Such a "first drop" came a hackman's way once in a blue moon.

There were other calls during the succeeding hour, short rides about the neighborhood which were of average profit. Then another young man entered the taxi, and again Marty cruised high, wide and handsome all over town on a tour of many stops. This trip brought him to the County Criminal Courts Building, to the office of a number of bail bonding operators, where groups of never absent loungers observed him idly from the doorways; then to the neighborhood police station, and to sundry other places of public and rather sinister character.

When this passenger also discharged the cab at the corner from which they had started, Marty studied the young man closely and wondered whether some devious relationship might not be traced between this ride and the first ride, and the visit to his room of Trigger Mike Como the night before. If so it evaded Marty. He decided not to look a gift horse in the mouth, but to be very grateful for what promised to be the most successful day in his brief career as hackman.

The promise was fulfilled. Late afternoon found Marty with fewer trips but more cash receipts than ever he had booked before. There was no obvious reason for the phenomenon; Marty had not even had to solicit the business. Sometimes a freakish run of luck singles out an individual driver, to enrich him one day and leave him stranded the next. This might be an example. Ordinarily Marty would accept it as such, but he sought now for hidden meanings in everything. And certainly the hidden meaning behind a day of extraordinary prosperity was thoroughly veiled.

The usual crowd was in Dirty John's when Marty entered that busy place at five o'clock. Nig Jonas was displaying a well filled day card to his comrades of the Big Shots' table, and his booming voice complacently was delineating his prowess as a hackman. At one end of the table Tom Macklin sat smiling in amusement at the big fellow.

Marty placed his day card on the table before them without a word of comment. A few derisive remarks died stillborn, and the silence of awe fell on the table. They gazed at the incredible sum of thirty-one dollars placed at the bottom of the row of figures, and could think of no suitable word to utter.

"What's that you were talking about, Nig?" Marty inquired.

"That wasn't me talking you heard, big boy!" Nig assured ardently. "No, sir, that was just a lot of hot air escaping from a great big gas bag that got needled."

"What happened?" asked Splints Nelson. "Somebody die and leave you all this?"

"Well," said Marty, sliding into the seat, "I rolled out at 9:00 this morning and hacked awhile. Then I took a couple of hours for lunch and hacked a little more. After that I went to the ball game and did a little hacking on the way down. It's all in the way you go about it. It's a gift, I admit."

"Don't let that guy sell you any horse cars," spoke up a voice. "I know what he did. He's doing a marathon; he's the original nonstop hackman. He took his rig out three days ago and didn't come back since!"

"This," declared Nig Jonas emphatically, "has gone far enough. At the next session of the legislature I'm going to see that the Hackmen's Association introduces a bill for the suppression of Martin King. He's a menace to the business and

a danger to every hackman trying to earn a dollar on the street."

"Motion seconded," came the doleful voice of Splints Nelson.

Marty laughed. It was pleasant to be in the company of these men. He found them not greatly different than those in uniform who were his late associates. They were less arrogant, perhaps, but they endured a hard grind cheerfully. They were eager and not too scrupulous in making an odd dollar wherever they could, but they were unenvious of the good fortune of others. They were something less than the salt of the earth, many of them, but they were good fellows all, tolerant and understanding.

"When I'm running my own fleet of three or four thousand cabs," Marty told them, "I'll remember you all with jobs. Anything for old time's sake. I'll put you to work washing cabs on the night shift for two pounds a week."

There was a chorus of heartfelt and eloquent derision.

Later, when most of them had gone and Marty was enjoying the excellent apple pie and coffee that Dirty John provided, Tom Macklin sidled along the bench close to him.

"How's tricks?" said Marty. "What's the latest murder mystery, Tom?"

"No new ones, but plenty of old ones to keep us busy," said Macklin. "I'm here again to see you, Marty."

"Yeah? What have I done now?"

"I don't know. Neither does the Old Man. That's why he sent me. You've been reported riding all day with hustlers from Mike Como's reorganized mob."

"I *what?*"

"You've been shoving Trigger Mike's men around town all day," repeated the detective. "The department is nuts over Mike's escape. I got chased over here to find out what it means."

Marty King put down his coffee cup and stared at the detective. Again that little twitching of the nostrils signaled its warning. He uttered a harsh oath.

"I get it now," he said. "I get it all. There's a frameup under way and I'm the poor slob with his whiskers caught in the wheels!"

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Macklin. "I think they're out for bigger game, but you may come in handy somewhere."

"They don't need to look for bigger game. I'm plenty big enough, and that wop's bright enough to know it. I'm not through with Mike Como yet, nor the department, believe me. Mike knows it. The department doesn't, but it's going to get an awful pain in the neck when it finds out."

"Well," said Macklin, with a faint touch of irony, "I'm only a poor flatfoot trying to get along in the world!"

"Don't worry! I'm not wasting my time being sore at anybody." Marty paused. "Riding around Trigger Mike's men all day! I'll be eternally damned! Taking me every place anybody could see me, making sure the Old Man would hear how I was shoving around Como's hustlers!" He turned to the detective. "Has the Old Man figured me in with them?"

"You know him," said Macklin, disclaiming any responsibility. "Some ways he's as fussy as an old maid. Whatever he figures, I'm not the one to know what it is. I was only told to ask questions, and I'm asking them."

"Well, there's no answer. It's hands off all around. Get that, Macklin?"

"Yeah," Macklin agreed dryly.

"What I do, I'm doing in my own way, and I want to be left alone. Pass that along where it'll do the most good. It goes for you too."

"All right, kid." The detective sighed and stirred. "I'm with you, personally. But so long as it remains a matter of opinion whether you're in the racket yourself or not, I'm neutral and I'm a cop. And cops were made to obey orders. Get the point?"

"I get it."

"O. K, then. Luck to you, kid!"

"And many of them!" echoed Marty.

CHAPTER V

FRYING PAN AND FIRE

THE FOLLOWING morning Marty first sought in other quarters of the city for his fares. He did not enjoy doing so, for any kind of compromise rankled like defeat. But something urging discretion spoke within him.

The strategy of Mike Como was obvious, though its aim was none too clear. Certainly there was greater purpose behind the activities of his henchmen yesterday than simple embarrassment of Marty. Not that the latter consummation was to be scorned. Como knew that Marty was under a cloud. A further shadow would darken his character to a most pleasing hue. Indeed, it might even be possible to compromise him so that his liberty would actually be jeopardized. And Marty had little desire to fight a battle of that sort with the racketeer, who had a powerful organization at his command, and guile far beyond the average to direct it. It was too much like fighting in the dark.

Another matter troubled Marty. He had not called for Rose at Luden's the night before. He had no definite reason for staying away; in fact, he had spent the entire evening alone in his room. It was the first time he had ignored a direct invitation, and he had done so when the desire to see her was like a searing pain that nothing could appease. But going to her had seemed like a surrender to weakness. Stubborn and grim and lonely in that hour, he had remained steadfast to his creed.

As the day wore on, Marty's conversion to discretion was gradually and surely undermined by a growing conviction of its futility. It, too, began to seem a surrender to weakness rather than a harkening to wisdom. It was not Martin King's way to tolerate the intolerable. And he had a fight on his hands in which Mike Como occupied but a minor part after all. It was a struggle to rehabilitate the name his father had passed on to him, and the coming of Mike Como could interrupt, but never alter, its course.

At midafternoon Marty found himself in the home neighborhood, where he discharged a passenger secured far downtown. He stood for a moment beside the empty cab in brooding thought. Then he climbed in, drove the few intervening blocks and fell into line at the taxi stand beside the subway exit around the corner from Max Luden's. There were two cabs ahead of him, both from the Barn, and Marty walked up to pass the time of day with their drivers.

Presently the head cab departed, and Marty, now second out, moved up a space. He jerked the brake, turned off the motor switch and was about to step from behind the wheel when the cab door was opened and a man proceeded to enter.

"The cab ahead, bud," said Marty. "I'm second out."

"That's all right," assured the passenger. He closed the door and sat back in the seat. "I don't want that rig. Drive on up the avenue; I'll tell you where to go."

Marty studied the man through the window. He was about thirty; his clothes were well cut if a little extreme in style; he had a pair of dark eyes which returned Marty's scrutiny with a kind of all-wise assurance.

"I'm sorry," said Marty, "but I can't take you."

"Oh, yes, you can. Come on, let's get going."

Marty came out on the sidewalk. He drew open the door.

"It's against the law for a hackman to pick up fares on a stand until he's first out," he declared with a touch of firmness. "I can't ride you. You'll have to take the one ahead."

The passenger smiled slightly, crookedly.

"It's also against the law for you to turn down a passenger who picks your rig, isn't it?"

The man was right in this, and Marty knew it. But Marty was concerned about

more than legal technicalities. He leaned inside the cab.

"Listen to me, big shot," he said. "You'll get the hell out of this cab right now. I'm off your kind completely. I told your boss where I stand, and I wouldn't ride you for a dollar a mile. Now beat it, and quietly."

The passenger touched a match to a cigaret.

"I've got plenty of time. Suppose I stay right here?"

"Then I'll drive to the garage and turn in the cab and you're welcome to spend the night there if you feel that way."

The man laughed, appreciating the shrewdness of the argument. The laugh acknowledged defeat, but declined to take it seriously.

"All right. You win." The fellow eased himself out of the seat. Standing on the sidewalk, he eyed Marty. "I waited a long time for you this afternoon, brother. I knew you'd show up. I wanted to talk to you."

Marty slammed the cab door.

"I'm not interested," he said. "I've got work to do."

"You'll listen to this, just the same. You were talking to Macklin yesterday, weren't you?"

Marty made no reply.

"I just wondered what you two happened to be talking about," went on the man.

"Nothing to bother you."

"No? That sounds better! You didn't mention certain people, seeing them or talking to them?"

"No, I did not."

"Well—certain people will be very glad to hear that. They've been wondering. If you were trying to pull a fast one, now, it would be too bad!" The man flicked his cigaret into the gutter. "Just keep that in mind, big boy."

"All right, all right, if you've spoken your piece, roll your hoop. You're hurting business."

The fellow grinned lazily, executed a farewell gesture and strolled off down the block. Marty stared after him a moment, and then, as the leading cab moved away, took his place behind the wheel and edged forward to the head of the line. A newcomer fell in behind and, coming out of his cab, walked up beside Marty. He nodded in the direction of the departing man.

"Friend of yours?" he inquired.

"No," said Marty.

"Know him?"

"Nope."

"Lay off him."

"Yeah?" There was a question in Marty's glance.

"He's one of Mike Como's mouthpieces. It ain't good sense to argue with those guys."

"I get you," said Marty. "But we weren't arguing. We were just having a friendly understanding."

"Oh!" said the other. He shrugged agreeably and changed the subject.

HALF an hour later, having acquired and discharged a passenger, Marty halted the cab before an old fashioned brownstone building midway in a shabby block. On either side of the entrance reared green paned lamps, with a number frosted on the glass. It was the station house which once had been Marty's headquarters.

The sergeant at the desk nodded greeting as he entered.

"The Old Man in?" Marty asked.

"In his office."

Marty knocked on the door and a voice bade him enter. Inside, a middle aged man in the uniform of a captain of police sat at a desk. He looked up with an odd sort of interest as he recognized his visitor.

"Well," he said. Facing Marty's unsmiling scrutiny, he was a little at a loss what to say. "Sit down. You're an unexpected visitor."

Captain Hammacher was a strong man and a shrewd one, as any officer who has worked his way up from the ranks must be. If he had faults they were likely to be those inherent in his profession. His men respected him equally for his rank and for

his balanced judgment, and if he flared up at them now and then he was just as quick to relent and sympathize.

Marty sat down and leaned an elbow on the desk.

"Captain, you told me after they broke me down below that any time I got in a jam I could come and talk it over with you."

"Yes."

"Well, I'm not in any jam, but I'm heading straight for it unless I get a break."

The officer studied Marty searchingly.

"Is there something I can do to see that you get one?" he asked.

"There is. It's this: I want to be left alone."

Captain Hammacher toyed with a pencil and reflected on that statement.

"Nobody bothering you, is there?"

"There is."

"Who?"

"You are."

The officer frowned as he glanced at Marty.

"I am? Will you kindly tell me just how in hell I'm bothering you?"

"Will you give me a good reason why you sent Macklin over to see me?"

"Oh!" said Hammacher. "Well, I should think you were enough of a cop to answer that yourself. Macklin told you what the reports were?"

"Yes. That I was shoving Mike Como's men all over town. Well, what if I did? I'm a hackman, ain't I, and I've got to make a living?" Marty's voice maintained an even temper, but it was insistent.

"Listen to me, Marty King," said the officer. "It's my job to know what's going on in this precinct. When I hear of anything out of the ordinary it's up to me to investigate it. What you did the other day was out of the ordinary; plenty out of the ordinary in view of the fact that Como is at large, and probably hiding out somewhere close by in this neighborhood. Headquarters hasn't forgotten you, remember. If anything were to break suddenly up here they'd probably want to know how about you, among other things. I aim to tell them all they need to know, if the time comes."

"Well," said Marty, "why can't they leave me alone? They never got anything on me, except a grudge!"

"They got a suspected murder, and a story they have every right to regard as fishy on the face of it, a yarn about a man who disappeared afterward into thin air."

"Yeah?" Marty was silent a moment, and his nostrils twitched faintly. "That's the thanks I get for doing a job that nobody in the precinct was able to tackle. They can remember a frameup easily, but their memories are mighty short about a pinch and a conviction that everybody fell down on. Hell!" He got up. For a moment he was silent. "What I want is simply a break, Captain. Lay off me. I got plenty to worry about myself with Como on the loose. I want to make a living and stay out of the racket as far as I can till I can get back into it right. If you and Como both get to work on me, I'm licked."

"All right, son," assurred Hammacher. "I'd like to see you crash through to a reinstatement. I'll do my best to keep meddling hands off, but I can't guarantee anything. It's got to be up to yourself."

"That's all I want. Let it be up to myself."

"I'll try, Marty. And I wish you luck."

Marty gazed at the officer and then thrust out his hand. Hammacher took it and gripped it heartily.

"Thanks," said Marty. He turned and walked from the office.

Marty drove directly to the Barn from the station house and turned in his cab. In the doorway of the garage a gang of shifters swiftly and dexterously refilled gasoline tanks and examined crankcase oil gages. Marty submitted the cab to their ministrations and then backed it into its appointed place against one wall.

He tossed cap and gloves into his locker and repaired to the restaurant. In the entrance, from which flowed a warm odor of food and tobacco, a woman thrust

forward a timid hand. She was a frail, thin creature, wretchedly garbed, and an abashed, hungry looking child clung to her side. The woman murmured some inaudible word, but Marty did not pause to discover her meaning. He reached into the pocketful of silver accumulated during the day and gave her half a dollar. She uttered wan thanks, which also went unheard, for Marty had passed inside.

At the Big Shots' table, where the usual crowd was convened, some one promptly demanded of Marty if that were his wife and child outside and, if so, why didn't he support them? Another voice came to Marty's defense, and declared that the pair were Nigger Jonas', his third, to be exact. The effort of maintaining the fourth, fifth and sixth wives exhausted his resources, it was explained. Nig Jonas being absent, the subject was discussed with unflattering and inventive thoroughness.

Nigger Jonas' appearance put a close to the discussion. This was not because the amiable big fellow in any way resented it, but because he explained the woman's presence in the doorway.

"That's Eddie Mason's wife and kid, you damn fools!" he told them. But no one knew Eddie Mason. "Used to hack in the neighborhood," Nig went on. "Took some kind of a rap for something, and left the wife and kid on the street. He'll hardly be out of jail for a year yet. She's been sick, too. Give her a cut of your tips on the way out, if the Scotch in you will let you."

Nig turned to Marty.

"Here," he said, "this is for you. They asked me up at the office to pass it along." He delivered to Marty a sealed envelope.

It was a note from Rose Shannon, hastily written and delivered by hand. It read:

> Marty: Watch out tomorrow! Just overheard a word or two in the restaurant with your name mentioned. Something on the make for tomorrow, and you're in it. Stay away from the job if you can. Please come see me.
>
> —ROSE

"What's the matter, Marty?" demanded Nig Jonas. "Your mother-in-law die?"

"No," said Marty dryly. "Nothing so trifling. I just learned I've been nominated for President on the Prohibition ticket by a unanimous vote."

He thrust the note in a pocket and cut a large and deliberate bite of apple pie from one of Dirty John's generous portions.

CHAPTER VI

THE TRAP SPRINGS

ALL THAT evening Marty remained in his room. He tried to read, first the newspapers, then a magazine, but was forced to abandon what was tonight a task. He smoked many cigarets, lying on the bed and staring at the ceiling. He smoked others, pacing noiselessly up and down the small strip of carpet between the door and the windows. Twice he jammed his hat on his head and gripped the doorknob. And twice he paused, hesitated, then jerked off the hat and resumed his restless pacing.

Too many problems confronted Marty, at once under the sharp suspicion of the police and the object of the uneasy vindictiveness of a powerful mob. Captain Hammacher's assurances were assayed by Marty at exactly their actual value, which was mighty small. The police department was a machine of terrific momentum; it had both a machine's blindness and its crushing strength. It had not the adaptiveness of an individual and it could not relent and sympathize. Marty had fallen foul of its most stringent exactions, and the memory would have to be erased before he could become disentangled. That not impossible outcome had every reasonable chance of fulfilment—until Mike Como reappeared on the scene. Now all Marty's headway was lost, and he had in addition a second and more ruthless enemy to face; an enemy who, out of fear inspired by his first defeat at Marty's hands, would know no ease

while Marty walked abroad unscathed.

Patience and watchfulness, which virtues Marty had learned through grim necessity, no longer afforded hope. Direct attack, when one adversary was so aloof and impregnable and the other so hidden and dangerous, was out of the question. What remained? Little indeed that one lonely human could conceive. It was like waiting for a blow out of the dark, when one is forced to give an opponent that advantage in order to locate him.

It had occurred to Marty that he might find perfect trust and a quiet, steadying sort of comfort at one source. He might talk things over with Rose Shannon and find a deep interest that would not be intrusive, an abiding concern that would never prove burdensome. If ever a man needed something like that, he needed it now. He had always thought of Rose as a prize, as a token of all happiness man can know, to be won and to be cherished. He had never quite thought of her as a need, so secure was he in his own strength. The very indefiniteness of their relation was due to the fact that he had just barely arrived at the point where he felt he could bring to her the things that a man should bring to the woman he wants and takes. And with those things stripped from him, his honor, his profession and his livelihood, he felt bare and empty handed and, with exceeding bitterness, unworthy.

One precious possession remained—the grim, indomitable force to carry on and see it through. In the strain of Martin King was the blood of fighting men, men with a queer quirk in their brains who regarded life as endurable only when lived as they wish to live it, honorably and by the strictest tenets of their unshakable code.

And thus it was that Martin King, with a strange hunger and an insistent determination at conflict within him, remained at home in his small, drab room through that long evening.

In the morning he was late on the job, for exhaustion had overtaken him and he had overslept. He had awakened, washed and dressed all within a few minutes, and it was not until he was on the greasily damp concrete of the Barn floor that he remembered the warning of yesterday afternoon. He had alternately resolved, in considering the matter, to heed it and to ignore it. He recalled the ingeniousness of his enemies on one occasion and was not without anxiety for their next move.

Yet, in viewing his daily round up and down the avenues of the city, he wondered whether he might not actually be safer at work on the crowded streets than anywhere else. He would have, at work, an alibi at least. A day of idleness without reasonable cause might in some way tend to incriminate him in an act of crime already afoot. Indeed, might not his enemies have learned somehow that any hint of danger uttered in Rose's hearing would be relayed to him immediately? It was not improbable that they counted on him to jockey himself into a position where he would be at their mercy. Marty, alert but not too apprehensive, checked in his time at the office and went to work.

On his way crosstown to the avenues where the most early morning business was to be found, Marty was hailed from the sidewalk. A rival cab preceding him by a few feet jammed on all brakes at the signal, and Marty shot forward to halt immediately behind it. The fare regarded the first taxi with tolerant scorn and jerked a thumb to order it onward. Then he walked to Marty's cab and entered. He gave an address a mile or so uptown.

There followed a series of strange maneuvers on that crosstown street. The way was narrow and Marty was unable to pass ahead of the empty taxi. Three separate individuals stepped to the curb in three successive blocks, when they hove into view and, after a second's hesitation, signaled to Marty to stop. Promptly in each case the leading taxi halted. And as promptly it was ordered to depart. Each of the three prospective customers glanced within Marty's cab to make certain that it actually was

occupied and, so ascertaining, seemed to lose all interest in any manner of taxicab. Marty noticed these things more by instinct than close observation, for the clamorous traffic demanded his attention. Soon they were free of the jam, and Marty sped uptown along a quiet, tree lined avenue.

THE DESTINATION proved to be a garage in a block of modest dwellings and shops, where the sidewalks were crowded with children making their noisy way to school. The passenger opened the cab door, but remained inside. A fellow lounging in the garage doorway nodded and disappeared. Shortly he emerged again with another man. Both wore caps and gray flannel shirts.

At sight of the second man Marty experienced a perceptible shock. He recognized the fellow. That tawny hair and the little white scar that ran downward from a corner of his mouth. It was Twist Anderson, one of the score or so of hangers-on of Como's mob whom Marty had long ago indentified and catalogued.

Marty reached for the taxi meter and threw the metal flag to the non-recording position.

"No business," he said through the window to his fare. "You better get another rig. I quit right here."

Twist Anderson and his companion heard and stopped on the curb beside the cab. Their hands were in their coat pockets.

"What was that, friend?"

"All out. I'm not riding anybody today."

Twist smiled, and the white line on his chin caused the odd distortion of the mouth that won him his name.

"Don't be funny," he said. "You ain't got a chance to argue the point. Just do what we tell you and we'll treat you right. Throw back the clock."

Marty studied him, studied his companion and glanced within the cab. He knew why the pair on the sidewalk held their hands in their pockets. He knew, too, why the man inside had removed his soft felt hat and hung it over his extended fist.

"Brother, there's a ticket for a free ride on the powder wagon here for you, if you want it," said the man inside. "How about it?"

Marty smiled, reached for the taxi meter and snapped the flag back to recording.

"All right," he said in philosophic surrender, "I'll ride you. But you've got the wrong customer if you expect to get anything out of me."

"Don't worry, friend," assured Twist Anderson, entering the cab. "We don't want anything from you. You won't have a thing to do, and if you're a good Indian you'll get treated square. Let's go!"

They started, and drove far uptown at a moderate pace. The trio inside conversed with animation of many things, but Marty could learn nothing of value from their talk. It was concerned with baseball, with horses and dice, with dead men and with women very much alive. It was gossip such as could be found on any street corner in the shadow of the Bridge.

Marty was instructed to halt alongside a black sedan of powerful make which was parked on a street of small homes in an outlying section of the town. At the wheel of the sedan a slender man with a small black mustache lounged, smoking and reading a newspaper. He roused instantly and, folding the paper, eyed Marty with curiosity. He was unknown to Marty.

Twist Anderson opened the cab door and, emerging, also opened the rear door of the black sedan.

"Get in!" he ordered Marty.

Marty's glance shot up and down the block. It was deserted; there was not even a third automobile in sight. He shrugged and obeyed. He made himself comfortable in the back seat of the sedan and waited.

"I want the cap," Twist next told him.

Twist handed the headgear to his companion of the garage, and the fellow donned it and took his place at the wheel of the taxicab. Twist entered the sedan beside Marty and closed the door.

"O. K, boys!" he said. "Everything's set!"

The two automobiles started up the block side by side and parted at the corner, the cab turning downtown and the sedan proceeding sedately toward the farther environs of the city.

"Make yourself at home," suggested Anderson, touching a match to a cigaret. "We're going for a nice long ride in the country, and we've got lots of time to kill before we get back."

Marty's hands were perfectly steady as he drew a cigaret from his own pack and struck a match to light it.

For three hours by the clock they drove Marty about the pleasant highways of the city suburbs. Twist Anderson made no effort to keep a close guard on him. He felt satisfied that Marty was convinced of the futility of mutiny. And Marty, riding in silence and viewing the ever changing scenery, was content to be convinced. At first there had been the grim possibility that the gang was taking him for a ride in the severest meaning of the phrase. But after a time Marty realized that nothing so brutal was under way. His heart was chill with apprehension for what was to come of the ride, but these gorillas would learn nothing of that from his calm demeanor.

At the end of the three hour period, Twist abruptly interrupted the long winded discourse of the driver anent the current liquor situation.

"Time to get back, Slim! You'll just about make it comfortably from here if you step on it."

"O. K," said Slim.

The big car turned, and headed swiftly for the city.

Marty realized that his ride was over when the sedan pulled to a halt in a downtown block and he recognized the cab parked nearby as his own. Twist grinned at him.

"There's your rig, safe and sound. We're obliged for the loan of it." He handed Marty a folded bill. "Here's a sawbuck for your trouble. You can't complain of our treatment!"

"No?" said Marty skeptically. "I'll let you know later."

He emerged from the big car and gazed at his captors.

"You through with me?" he asked.

"You can go. All over."

"Well, I hope so. If there's any comeback on this, Twist, I'm going to get you, so help me God, if it takes a year!"

He turned and crossed the street to the cab. In an instant the black sedan was coursing on its way, horn blowing derisively.

Marty could discover nothing at fault as he walked around his rig with searching scrutiny. Even the gas tank had been filled, so that he had no way of knowing how far it had been driven. The motor turned over readily and roared with power. The interior was as before, a little worn but clean. The paint was unmarred on the body. And then he discovered a clue.

It was on the license plate at the rear, and it was a small, clean puncture through the thin metal. The edges of the little hole were smooth on the face of the plate and ragged on the side that faced the car. The instrument causing the puncture had penetrated from the rear and there was only one thing capable of so clean a hole. A bullet had done the job.

The instant Marty realized this fact, he shrank from touching the cab. Already his finger prints were on the wheel and about the machine, freshly impressed. He tossed his driver's cap under the seat and abandoned the taxi, starting up the street bareheaded in sober flight.

Considering the shadow that already rested on his name, this was no place for Marty to be found—not, at least, until he had ascertained the nature of his predicament and weighed its gravity.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE TOILS

MARTY went straight home, washed and changed his clothes swiftly and proceeded from there to Luden's. Rose was behind the desk, busy with the midday rush. She maintained a professional air, smiling brightly on the stream of patrons who came to her to pay their checks. But when the first free moment came she turned on Marty, waiting at the side, a face full of gravity.

"Did you get my note?"

"I did," said Marty.

"Has anything happened?"

"Yes."

The girl put her hand to her cheek in a vague gesture of dismay and fear.

"Marty! What—"

Briefly he told her the little he knew. She had no opportunity to comment, for her duties claimed her. A minute later she said quietly:

"Go have your lunch in that empty booth across. I'll join you soon as I can get Max to relieve me."

Marty seated himself in one of the semi-private dining nooks which ran along the side wall of the restaurant. He ordered lunch from the stolid Bavarian who attended his table, though when the food was served he ate little of it. Rose soon persuaded her boss to release her and slid into the seat opposite.

"Marty, I'm frightened," she said. "I know too much about those people."

"What was it you heard yesterday?"

"Only the vaguest word. One of the waiters overheard it as a matter of fact, and he came and told me. Something about you being taken for a joy ride today. That was all; naturally they weren't discussing their plans in public, they were only laughing over it as a joke."

"It must be a good one," said Marty. "Listen, Rose, here's what I want you to do. You know Nig Jonas, don't you?"

"He's been here with you?"

"Yes, he and his wife both."

"I think I know him. Big man with a dark complexion and a deep voice?"

"That's Nig. I want you to get some time off from the job and go find Nig. If you have luck you'll likely run into him on the line at the corner. I'm not going to run the risk of showing my face more than necessary. If he's not around, ask some of the boys what line he's playing today. Some one will surely have seen him, and chances are if he has luck on some line he'll play it steady all day."

"All right, Marty. What will you do?"

"I'll park right here. I'm as safe here as anywhere for the present."

"I'm off, then." And she slid from the seat and was gone.

Alone, Marty had nothing to occupy him but reflection, and that of a most sorry sort. He began to perceive the full measure of his helplessness at the hands of the organization Trigger Mike controlled. They had the cunning and the strength of numbers to waylay him this morning so easily that he never tumbled to their scheme. They had simply ascertained his usual morning route from the Barn and had planted decoys in relays along the way so that if one failed to snare him, the next would not.

During that long and unhurried trip through the suburbs they had used Marty's cab for some nefarious purpose; no other possibility was worth considering. Two things had been accomplished thereby. The use of a taxi, rather than one of their own cars, had covered their trail; and the cab, readily traced because of its distinctive design and its license number, would incriminate Marty. And Marty, if he attempted to charge Twist Anderson with abduction, would face in court a dozen staunch witnesses to Twist's latest alibi, and in addition a prosecutor very skeptical of the value to the State of a broken policeman's word. The processes of justice are devious, and Marty's chances of treading them safely were slight.

A shadow came over the empty table, and Marty looked up to see Rose approaching with Nig Jonas in tow. There

was deep sympathy in the big man's eyes and wrath in the set of his jaw.

"What kind of a racket is this being pulled?" he demanded the instant he sat down. "I'd call it a hot line of boloney if it wasn't Miss Shannon told it to me!"

"It may be boloney to some, but it's poison to me," said Marty. "Here it is in a small package: I got a hail a block from the Barn on my way out this morning. It was a six bit rip to a garage uptown, the sort of place where they don't mind doing a little monkey business on the side. The guy in the cab passes the office to some young chiseler in the doorway, and the chiseler brings out Twist Anderson. That's where I came to, but a lot of good it did me. They wave three rods in my face and order me further uptown. At the next stop I'm invited out of the seat into a flash sedan, and the guy from the garage takes the cab. Twist and I go for a nice long ride out into the country, and three hours later I'm brought back to where they have my rig parked. They haven't done a thing to it that I can see—nothing but a neat little hole about size .45 in the rear license plate. The minute I spotted that I beat it."

"Where's the rig?" asked Benson.

Marty told him.

"The reason I'm calling on you is because you can find out where I stand before I show myself. It may be that the little hole is only their idea of a joke. And it may be that they don't even know it's there. I might have gone on pushing that truck around the rest of the day, and sometime this afternoon have a squad of strong arms drop on me like a load of brick."

"And they'd drop from about ten stories higher, knowing it was a hackman," observed Nig Jonas. "I'd like to have a look at the cab."

"That would be a good idea. I might have missed something; I quit looking in an awful hurry. And you'd have a natural reason to stop and wonder at a cab left abandoned."

"I'll do that," said Nig, rising. "Do you want to ride in my cab, Miss Shannon?"

Rose glanced at Marty.

"Go ahead," said Marty. "You may be able to help him."

"All right," said Rose. "I hope so."

Once again Marty was alone at the table with his thoughts.

This period of solitude, however, was of short duration. Jonas and the girl were back in record time. Marty, watching them come in the door, read ill tidings in the expressions on their faces. They did not speak until they were in the seats and bending close over the table.

"I didn't get a chance to give your rig the once over," Nig said gravely. "There was a police sedan and a couple of bulls on the spot taking it over. We kept right on going, up the block. But on the way back we stopped and bought a paper. Your cab was the getaway wagon in a holdup of the Wilson Foundation Company's payroll on the new power house job. They wore masks and they shot a guard and they got away clean. But the Wilson people took the cab license, and the alarm is all over the city to pull you in, dead or alive."

Nig Jonas spread on the table before Marty the newspaper in which the brief but gruesome details of the crime were narrated.

CHAPTER VIII

SURRENDER

AND SO the fight was ended. The heart went out of Marty as he read those lines. He had not the strength to face again the ordeal that he had once survived. What chance had he this time? If the plotters went to such lengths, why might they not go further and have "witnesses" planted at the scene of the holdup, men who would identify Marty as the getaway wagon driver beyond any possibility of doubt? Marty was licked, and neither rage nor false hope could contend with the simple logic of it.

For some minutes Marty stared with

unseeing eyes at the blurred lines of type. The other two watched him, silent. Then he got to his feet.

"Marty!" the girl said quickly, half in plea and half in query.

He gazed into their eyes, and there was a look on his face that neither had ever seen before. It was the look of a man who can sink to despair but can not stay there; who rises in the torment of unquenchable energy to a recklessness that will produce a hero or a ruthless outlaw.

"When I needed two good friends I knew where to find them," he said. "I knew I could count on them. There's nothing more you can do for me now. I'm going my way and I'm going alone. I can't very well drag you two into the fire with me. I don't know if I'll see you again."

The girl came to her feet.

"No, no, Marty," she begged. "Marty—"

Nig Jonas gripped her arm so fiercely that it hurt, and she sat down.

"Quiet!" he whispered hoarsely. "Do you want to draw a crowd *now?*"

So much emphasis was unnecessary, but Nig was taking no chances.

"I'll be quiet," said the girl. "But, Marty—please!" There was panic in her voice.

Signs of struggle flitted over Marty's face.

"Rose, what else is there to do? You've got to face it. And face it quietly, for my sake. Well—I'm going!"

He started for the door. Nig Jonas sprang after him.

"I'm coming with you," he announced.

"You're not coming with me," said Marty. "You're going to stay and take care of that girl."

Nig glanced at the stricken face of Rose Shannon and was nonplused.

"Just because I'm leaving her doesn't mean that you can walk out!" Marty said with the sting of acid.

Nig's jaw tensed as he stared Marty in the eye. Abruptly he returned to the booth. Marty's eyes followed his broad back and he hesitated. Then he whirled and went out the door.

Marty walked several blocks downtown and then bent his steps toward the waterfront. He passed through streets of increasing disrepute, until he came to a small restaurant situated in a basement. A flight of worn wooden steps led below from the sidewalk, and no sign identified the place, yet it scarcely seemed to suffer from lack of patronage. A number of swarthy men sat at small linen covered tables, eating spaghetti and drinking wine and conversing excitedly with many fervent gestures. Marty found an empty table in a corner and took possession.

"*Vino!*" he told a young waiter. "And no red ink, mind!"

"*Si, signor!* Some nice *Chianti?* Is very good!"

"Make it *Chianti*, then. And tell the boss I want him."

The waiter hurried off.

Presently the *padrone* appeared, personally serving a small round bottle bound in straw. He was a portly man of enormous mustaches and ebullient spirits, and he handled the bottle as if it contained nectar.

"*Com' esta*, Marty King?" he demanded. "Look! I bring the very best *Chianti* in the house, straight from the old country. How you like *that*, eh?"

Marty sipped the ruby beverage and judged it good. The proprietor beamed.

"Where you been so long, Marty, eh? We have not seen you lately."

"Been driving a hack, Joe. Pretty busy."

"Making lots money, eh? That's fine!"

Marty grinned.

"Not such a hell of a lot. Listen, Joe, I want you to do me a favor. I want to talk to Mike Como. Get me one of his boys, will you? Tell him I'd like to see him and arrange it. I can wait here till he comes."

The proprietor searched in Marty's eyes.

"What for you come to me, Marty? I don't know Mike Como."

"Well, what of that? You know his crowd. I'm not starting anything. All I want to do is have a talk. You can fix that up."

"I can fix that maybe." The man gave an enormous shrug. "I don't know. I will see."

The proprietor left the table and disappeared for a time. Etiquette demanded that he deny acquaintance with Como, and that Marty not challenge his veracity. But Marty had not acted idly in coming to this place. After an interval the *padrone* returned.

"Some one will be here soon. You wait. Now, if you excuse me, I must see to my kitchen."

Marty was alone again. His request had been quickly relayed by telephone and was shortly to be answered. Leisurely Marty sipped his glass of wine and waited.

Marty recognized his man the moment he stepped within the door. It was the sleek, dark eyed individual whom Marty had ejected from his cab only yesterday morning. The fellow hailed acquaintances about the room and gave Marty no sign of recognition until he had advanced among the tables and dropped into the chair opposite.

"Well, big boy, what's the trouble?" he inquired. "I hear you're looking for a conference."

Marty was unhurried. He finished the wine and placed the glass on the table. His mouth formed a small, wry smile.

"I'm through," he said. "I'm licked. I just wanted to tell you about it."

The fellow grinned thinly.

"Oh, yeah?" He pulled up his chair and beckoned to the waiter. "Hey, bozo! Some more of the red! Have another drink," he invited Marty.

Over his refilled glass Marty explained. The gang had him down for the count. There was nothing left for him to do but bid for terms.

"I don't know what your aim is," he said, "but I'd like to find out. You got what you wanted now. What do you intend to do with me next?"

"Well—" the other considered. "What would you say?"

Marty gazed at him steadily.

"Got a job for me?"

"Who can tell? What makes you ask us for a job?"

"Where else can I go?"

"I don't know. Why didn't you think of that before?"

"Even if I did, it wouldn't have made any difference. Not while I was on the make. But I'm licked now and have to make the best of it. It's up to you."

"I see." The fellow drummed thin fingers on the table top. "How'd you like to have a talk with Mike?"

"That's exactly what I want."

"O. K." The other rose abruptly. "Let's go, then."

Without further parley they threaded their way through the tables and up to the sidewalk. A sedan was parked there, with the driver lounging at the wheel. Marty failed to recognize the chauffeur, though the car was the same powerful make as that in which he had been taken for a "joy ride." He entered and his guide followed. The driver promptly set off without instructions.

There was no conversation. Marty's companion supplied the information that he was known as Jack Lombardo and that Marty would be required to do certain things preliminary to the interview which he must accept without question. They drove swiftly downtown and soon were in the traffic crawling to the Bridge. For a time their pace was slow, and then they were out on the broad bridge approach. They picked up speed and flew over the highway atop the mighty span. The sun spilled patches of gold on the black asphalt beneath their wheels, and far below the river was an amazingly blue jewel against the hazy obscurity of the town.

That portion of the city which clustered about the far end of the Bridge was unbelievable colorless and drab. It was a section of small factories and brick tenements which lacked even the mellowness of age. The car parted from the main traffic and crept through a narrow street

where heedless children and dogs and slow delivery wagons impeded progress. After several blocks Lombardo drew a black silk handkerchief from his pocket and addressed Marty.

"You'll have to wear this from here on, big boy. And we can't have you sitting up there like a showcase dummy; you'll have to park on the floor for a while. Slide down."

Obediently Marty eased to the floor and permitted Lombardo to fix the blindfold securely over his eyes. Then in response to the pressure of a hand, he lay on the floor as comfortably as possible. Lombardo threw over him the rug which had hung on a rack behind the driver's seat. In pitch darkness, aware only by the movements of the car that they were still traveling, Marty awaited their arrival.

THE RIDE occupied more time than Marty expected. There were more turns than he could keep track of, and there were intervals when the smoothness of their progress indicated that they drove along paved highways. They were approaching Como's hideout by a devious route, Marty suspected, and for two reasons: first, to confuse Marty, and second, to throw off any possible pursuit.

At length they arrived. Lombardo shook Marty's shoulder as the car slowed.

"All right, King, rise and shine. But don't move the handkerchief."

Marty threw off the rug and edged back on the seat. The car stopped and he heard the door swing open. Lombardo took his arm and they climbed out. Following his guide, Marty hurried over concrete, turned once, bumped into something low—a fence, probably—and then mounted a short flight of steps. There was a brief parley at a door, and they proceeded inside. After passing through several rooms, Marty was at last halted and left standing alone. A hand whisked the blind from his face. He blinked in bright electric light. There was a table with a broad space before; there were several faces about, all staring at him; there was a man watching him from a chair behind the table. The man was Trigger Mike Como.

"Hello, wop," said Marty. "I'm paying back your call."

Como reached forth a slim hand and plucked a cigaret from a box on the table. He inserted it in the ivory holder and deftly snapped a match to flame. When he spoke there was again irony in his rasping voice, but no unction; rather it was accompanied by force and the assurance of power.

"It took you a long time to get around to it, King."

"It would have taken longer," Marty assured him evenly, "if I'd had my way about it."

"Yes?" The racketeer elevated eyebrows and puffed on the cigaret. He glanced at Lombardo, standing nearby. "Frisk him?" he questioned.

Lombardo shook his head.

"Why the hell not?" inquired Como. "Do it!"

Lombardo passed quick hands all over Marty. He found nothing; the gun was never carried during working hours.

"All right," said Como. "Now get out, all of you."

The gang filed outside. Marty could see a shaft of daylight through the door, which he judged led into a hallway. This room was dark only because black velvet hangings closed off the windows. It seemed to be an office; it had only the table, a secretary against the wall close by and a number of chairs. It made a good place in which to interview people brought to the house in a blindfold, for it told nothing of the character of the house or its environs.

One other door caught Marty's eye. It was ajar and evidently opened into a closet. And it was sufficiently ajar to give a hint, by a metallic gleam in the darkness, of its contents. The closet, safe at Como's back, was an armory of deadly weapons of a terrible modern efficiency.

The hall door closed and they were alone. Mike Como fixed Marty with

his gaze, leaning over the table.

"Well, rat, are you satisfied now?"

Marty grinned unpleasantly.

"Yes, greaseball, I am."

"Hm! Smart guy, ain't you?"

"Sometimes."

"But not this time."

"We both have our off moments," Marty agreed.

"Have a chair." The racketeer waved to a seat beside the table. "Have you seen the papers?"

"Yes." Marty helped himself to a cigaret.

"They're looking for you," Como went on. "Right now they are probably going through your belongings at your room. I thought you'd have sense enough to stay away from there," he conceded.

"You thought right."

"It would have been sad if you had thrown yourself on the mercy of the police this time. The cops have several good descriptions of the guy that drove away from that stickup."

"Remarkably like me, I suppose."

"Dead finger," agreed Trigger Mike. "It's going to be hard on that guy when they catch him, because he's the one that smoked the guard."

Marty leaned on the table.

"All right, I know all that stuff. Let's get down to business."

"Fine. Where do we start?"

Marty's brows raised.

"That's up to you. If you think I'm going to be fish, you better send me back and turn me loose. If you want to talk turkey, let's commence."

"Huh!" uttered Como through a wreath of cigaret smoke. "You looking for a job?"

"Yes."

"Any special kind?"

"What have you got?"

"Oh, maybe we'll let that ride. You'll take what you get."

Marty shrugged. Como noted the gesture and continued.

"I think I'll put you on one of the trucks as a cannon for awhile. That'll keep you busy and out of sight. Also out of trouble. I don't trust you worth a damn, King."

"And you never will. Nor will I trust you. But we'll let that ride too. What do I do on these trucks and what's in them?"

"They're on the liquor run coming in from the Island, and you'll ride with a sawyer across your knees and drag your pay for seeing to it that they keep on running."

"A sawed off shotgun?"

"Yeah, a sawyer."

"O.K, then. When do I start?"

"Right now." Como pressed a button beneath the table. The door instantly opened and a face appeared.

"Send in Lombardo," said Como.

The door closed, to open presently when Lombardo appeared.

"Right, Chief!"

"Take this guy to Tommy Curtin and tell Tommy to put him to work. I'll talk to him on the phone." To Marty he added, "And I'll be seeing you again sometime soon, Marty King. Meantime you will remember this: if you rat on us, you will have the most unpleasant kind of a death we know how to give you. If you ever rat, I say God help you!"

Marty got to his feet and smiled a hard, unimpressed smile.

"Take it out and bury it, wop," he said, starting for the door. "It's so stale it smells bad. You leave me alone from now on, and I'll run your liquor like it was never run before. Come on, big shot," he said to Lombardo, "let's be on our way!"

"And don't forget the handkerchief," reminded Como mockingly as the door was closing after them.

Marty had got his job.

CHAPTER IX

THE RACKET

THAT night Marty went to sleep in a strange bed, in a strange room where a man he had never seen before slept in another bed opposite. A full harvest moon slanted in a window,

and for a long time Marty watched it, finding in its austere and lovely unreality a soothing peace. He had need of it. Facing the fact of his completely collapsed world, once he was alone, was not easy. It had been easy all day, for then he was engaged in a conflict of wits and he had played a rôle surely and with effect. At another time it might have been an adventure, thus to enter the ranks of his direst enemies. He had come to them in defeat, responding to an impulse of pure self-preservation, and he had scoffed at them to their faces. They might have guessed, but they could not possibly know, the measure of his desperation. He had increased their respect for him and even their admiration—which was what he sought. As to their regard—for this he had no need.

Lombardo had blindfolded Marty again and taken him away from Como's hideout. The fantastic precautions exercised to guard the secret were well taken. Marty knew no more of the gang leader's whereabouts now than before. And he was most anxious to make certain of that precious bit of knowledge. In it there was power for him, and freedom. Como was shrewd enough to know the fact and to take heed.

After a long interval of driving, Lombardo had removed the blind from Marty's eyes. He found the car in a remore section of the city, still on the same side of the Bridge. Here the original land had not been entirely engulfed, and open, swampy stretches alternated with cheap, hastily constructed buildings—dwellings, shops, small factories, garages. There were also a few ancient houses of decayed grandeur, most of them abandoned in their weed grown yards, and a small number devoted to real estate development offices or fly-by-night projects. At least one, ostensibly a temporary warehouse, housed a bootleg depot. It was to this that Marty was taken.

It was a great, rambling structure, a mansion in its day, secure behind tall hedges, and to it were attached a goodly number of barns and outbuildings in which to store trucks. The spacious cellars of the place gave the cutters and fixers plenty of room in which to ply their skill on the liquor brought in from farther out on the Island, and in the rooms upstairs the truck crews slept and played poker and remained concealed by day. At night they were on the liquor run, weather permitting. Tonight the full moon made the venture too hazardous.

The house was fitted inside like a fortress. Steel bars, not visible from the outside, made secure the windows, and each door was backed by a steel plate anchored by firm hinges and kept locked. It was a place exceedingly hard to get into —or get out of.

The boss of the place was Tommy Curtin, a small, quick moving Englishman, once of the legitimate liquor trade, who had readily adapted himself to the exigencies of another country's queer way of doing things. He was a man without a scruple, and he bossed the big fellows of his crew as effectively in his noisy fashion as did Trigger Mike Como by his more urbane methods.

"So we've a cop in the crowd now, eh?" he said on meeting Marty. "Well, me lad, we've got 'em here all sizes, from mine to yours, and they all behave. I fancy you'll do likewise, eh? Won't you?"

"I fancy so myself," assured Marty.

"Fine. Now chase upstairs with the rest. I'm busy, and I'll let you know when you're wanted."

Marty found the house rather like a temporary military barracks. None of the men regarded the place as a residence, but merely as a convenient sleeping quarters between jobs. When not sleeping they played poker on a fine old mahogany table in a large room on the second floor. They were so engaged when Marty arrived, and they accepted him as casually as if he were an old acquaintance returning from an errand in the next room. He sat in the game and became one of them within the hour. The game continued well into the night,

but Marty retired comparatively early to a bed assigned him in a room on the floor above. It was there, as he watched the great, calm moon, that the excitement of the day dwindled and died and a queer, longing wonder had time to make known its presence in his heart. He fell asleep still baffled by a puzzle that had no answer.

The next day was a repetition of the first afternoon. The poker game was resumed, and only the roughly served but palatable meals in the kitchen below interrupted it. Marty hovered in and about the game all day, for all that his curiosity concerning the plant in the cellar remained unsatisfied. He saw nothing of Curtin and did not ask for him. Marty knew his proper rôle and he played it with thoroughness.

A slight rain set in that afternoon and continued through the twilight into dark. It was a perfect night for the truck fleet. Before nine o'clock they were ready in the back yard, five enormous vans covered with stiff brown tarpaulin. Tommy Curtin appeared and apportioned to each man his armament. He handed Marty a queer weapon, a shotgun with short twin barrels a shade over twelve inches in length. It had a heavy pistol grip, but no shoulder stock. Marty found it an excellently balanced gun and had no doubt about its viciousness in use. He was handed over to a driver and led through the rain to his truck.

Soon they got under way. The convoy traveled in three sections, four minutes apart. First there was a single truck; next, a few hundred yards in the rear, a cluster of three; and last, a lone afterguard of one. Marty recognized the cunning military strategy of the formation. It was like the routing of an invading army. The first was the payoff truck, the scout; the cluster of three formed a main body, ready to fight; the last was the sacrifice truck, destined to surrender to any serious pursuit and thus enable the others to escape. Marty's truck was in the center of the line, the second of the group of three.

Marty was alone in the truck cabin with the driver. In the darkness he could distinguish nothing about it that was different from any other truck on the road. The glass, he finally noted, had a curious, dirty cast, the unwashed look of all bullet proof window material. Aside from the gun on his knees, no other armament was visible.

"How long is this ride?" he asked the driver, raising his voice above the rumble of the giant motor.

"Couple of hours!" the other shouted. "It's slow travel. We have to keep 'er stepped down."

"Where do we go?"

"You'll see."

And for some time that was the extent of their conversation.

It was a dull ride. The drizzle gathered on the windows and obscured their vision, though at best only an occasional pool of light from a roadside arc lamp was to be seen against the blackness of the night. They followed a winding asphalt road on which houses were infrequent. Now and again an auto horn wailed impatiently behind them, and a tightly closed sedan scurried past, speeding to be home out of the dismal wetness.

The driver thawed out after a time and began a conversation. It was one sided, being reminiscenses of other nights on the liquor run. He told Marty tales of hijackers, of prohibition men, of rival runners, of avaricious deputy sheriffs and small town police chiefs. He narrated many amusing incidents concerning innocent natives of the countryside who had aided the convoys and described their consternation or delight on discovering its real nature. It was the talk of a man content with a job well done, neither beguiled by its glamour nor impressed with its singularity.

Marty's attitude toward this manner of outlawry, in common with that of the police, was one of impartiality. It had not been his job, as a cop, to enforce a law which the people he served did not seem to hold worthy of respect. And a cop, after all, is the servant of his community. If liquor

went hand in hand with crime, then it was stamped out along with crime. If the trade was pursued quietly, sedately, so that it became no public nuisance, then it was tacitly ignored. Marty felt complete indifference to this present manifestation of Mike Como's power. So far as he was concerned it could continue without interruption. But if, in a clash with Como, it were to be destroyed, it mattered little. Some one else would pick up where Como left off and the rum would keep on running. Had Como restricted himself to this field, there was small likelihood that he would now be a fugitive with years of prison on his head.

THE CONVOY reached its destination some time before midnight. It turned off a lonely road into a tree bordered lane that led to a farmyard. To all appearance the place was a quite ordinary and respectable farm, with implements of agriculture lying about the barns, and harvest acres stretching fruitfully beyond. A door of the farmhouse was open, an oblong of yellow light in the darkness. Marty heard voices and saw men in slickers moving about. Then the driver placed the truck in position and ordered Marty out.

In the doorway of one of the outhouses several rows of barrels were revealed in the beam of a flashlight. The truck crews threw themselves at the barrels. They were full and heavy, and Marty noted with approval that the wood was aged and mellow. Evidently the stuff was distilled somewhere near and gathered here for delivery in fine old whisky barrels. Marty doubted that it was aged for any great length of time. Lack of secure storage space prevented that.

Marty assisted in the loading. As each truck was filled to capacity, another moved into position. By their combined efforts the entire shipment was aboard in a short time. There was some further talk with the "farmer," unrecognizable in his sou'wester, and then the convoy was ready. Marty could not but marvel at the efficiency of the whole transaction.

The return was made in the same formation. Marty sensed an increase of tension in the driver now. He indulged in no casual talk, but conversed when necessary in curt sentences, concentrating his attention on the truck ahead and listening carefully to the occasional honking of the horns before him. Evidently the drivers kept in communication by a system of signals.

On through the night they rolled, heavy laden with a fortune in liquor. It was liquor cheap to produce, but expensive to handle; good, honest whisky distilled by a careful hand, but destined for heaven knows what manner of transformation under the cunning of the fixers. It would appear in bottles carefully labeled and stamped. Diluted and dishonored, it would go forth in the world at exorbitant prices as a mockery of itself. It would be the prey of dishonest men from this moment till it was consumed, and before its mission of good cheer was fulfilled it would leave a trail of graft and deceit and perhaps even death. It was a boon born under an evil star.

The shotgun rested on Marty's knees and, feeling the undercurrent of menace that pervaded the convoy, his hands never released their hold on it. What was expected of him in an emergency he was not certain. He could take his cue from the others. Because of his inexperience, he judged, they had placed him where he would be between tried and sure men in the event of trouble.

Once the convoy halted. There was a brief blast of the horn ahead, and the first of the three trucks pulled to a halt. Marty's driver touched his horn in response and stopped close behind the other. The stop light at the rear of the truck ahead flashed on and off several times. Again Marty's driver touched his horn in acknowledgment. Then he sat back and lighted a cigaret.

"What's up?" demanded Marty.

"Little conference up the line. The leader's been held up, but it's O. K. They'll have to hand out some jack.

I expect, and then we'll go ahead."

The wait was brief. Marty could see nothing, for the dripping foliage pressed close on each side of the road, but presently the truck ahead flashed its stop light again, and then crept into motion with powerful crashing of gears. Marty's driver followed, and they were off. They trundled along the narrow road for a few hundred yards and came to a highway intersection. A speedy, low coupé rested there, and beside it stood a tall man in black rubber garments. He waved an "all clear" signal with a flashlight, and the trucks rumbled on.

"Who was that?" Marty inquired.

"Got me. I never talk to them. Some cop, or law of some sort, I expect. He's made a month's salary for himself tonight."

Marty grinned to himself with ironic understanding. That was a racket he understood, having witnessed much and heard of more all his lifetime. Many policemen have astonished the world by their acute financial genius in amassing a fortune in a few years out of a small weekly wage.

The remainder of the ride was without event. Every moment Marty expected trouble to descend on them out of the night, but none came. It seemed fantastic to him that lawbreaking could go on in such wholesale fashion without more difficulty than this. And yet how natural, when the community at large placed no stigma on it and, indeed, rather endowed it with a halo of romance! The convoy rolled into the yard of the home depot. Safe behind the tall hedges, every one got out, stretched contentedly and breathed a sigh of satisfaction.

Marty climbed down from his truck with the shotgun in his hand. He was ordered to assist in the unloading, keeping the gun nearby. The discharge of the cargo was performed with the same dispatch as its receipt, and soon Marty was free. He followed the crew, strolling toward the house in animated conversation.

Close to the door Marty conceived a shrewd thought. He "broke" the gun and felt in the breeches for the shells. His fingers slipped readily into the yawning chambers. There were no shells and the gun had been empty all the while.

Marty grinned to himself and said nothing of the matter when he handed the weapon to Tommy Curtin within the house.

"Well," said Curtin, "how d'you like the job?"

"O. K. with me!" assured Marty.

"You won't always have as easy a time of it, me lad, and bear that in mind!"

"I hope not. If all the excitement you had around here was a poker game I'd have to quit and go some place where I belonged."

"Don't you worry!" said Curtin. "You'll not pine for excitement long."

Marty went upstairs. The poker game was already in progress, though it was close to dawn. He sat in, and before the session broke up in broad daylight he had gathered before him a hundred and forty dollars of the crew's money. A bottle of liquor remained on the table the while, and they drank a final toast.

"To crime!" said Marty.

And to crime a cop was welcomed.

CHAPTER X

MUTINY

FOR A week Marty lived the life of a racketeer and found it uneventful. He knew that he was under close surveillance and doubted not that Como inquired after him by phone each day. His status had been clearly revealed to him the first night by the uselessness of his empty weapon. On his second ride a night later he found the gun loaded, and he was given, without explanation, a box of shells to carry in addition. So Curtin, at least, was satisfied.

Marty had no opportunity to use the gun. Once he thought the time had come, but events dictated otherwise. As the fleet was rolling along an empty

country lane the leading truck of the trio suddenly stopped. Marty's driver threw on all brakes with a curse and jerked to a dead halt. A man from the other vehicle ran back to their cabin. The driver opened a window.

"What's up?"

"Bruckner's held up ahead. I can see his lights. His tail has been flashing, but he hasn't given us the clear. Let's douse all lights and give it the once over."

"You bet," declared Marty's driver. He switched off head and tail lights and leaped from the cabin. Marty started to follow, but was ordered back.

"Stay there, King. Keep your eyes peeled for trouble. If we don't come back in a few minutes, take the wheel and back out of here with the other trucks. Get off the road somewhere and scatter. Find your way home then the best you can."

And he was gone.

Marty listened tensely in the night silence for a long time. One man had been left in each truck, and the three drivers had advanced to reconnoiter, their weapons ready. Something was decidedly amiss when the scout truck halted without reason or subsequent explanation. If it were a hijacker raid, Marty was prepared to give the raiders all the shotgun carried. He had no conscientious scruples on that score.

Suddenly every nerve in his body went hot at the sound of guns firing. It was a sound at once terrifying and arousing, for it held the menace of the unknown. Marty felt caged, seized with a strange, berserk fury to fling himself into combat. Sitting alone in a place where bullets might come tearing any moment was not conducive to calmness. A craven might have cowered; a fighting man looked for action.

For almost a minute the firing continued. It came in staggered bursts, and by the varying pitch of the reports, was from several weapons. When it ended there was but one pitch to the thunderous rattling up the road. There were a series of brief, staccato blasts swifter than drumbeats. They ceased and there was silence.

The silence now was worse than the gunfire. The danger then was localized. Now, with the issue settled one way or the other, it spread. Had the drivers repelled an attack, or had a raid been successful? Should the three trucks turn in instant flight, or await the return of the drivers?

A cone of light traveled down the road, bobbing up and down with the stride of the man carrying the flashlight. Marty slid out of the truck cabin to the road. He took a stand behind the truck and waited.

"O. K, trucks!" a voice called. "All over. Come ahead!"

Mystified, Marty jumped back behind the wheel, started the motor, and followed the first truck toward the scene. His driver leaped aboard as he was approaching. He saw ahead several flashlights, and their beams illuminated a fast sedan at one side of the road. Two men were either assisting or depositing other men into the sedan, and the latter were quite limp.

"What was it, Pete?" Marty asked.

"Stickup! Didn't work. We turned a Tommy gun on 'em. They thought the first truck was alone. O. K, boy, let me have the wheel!"

Marty surrendered the controls and watched through the window. When they were on the scene the first truck was already under way and it stepped into considerable speed. Marty's driver, Pete, did not pause, but swept on by and increased his own speed. One of the men at the sedan swung aboard the third truck. The remaining man slid into the sedan and started the motor. Then Marty's truck passed beyond the field of vision. The driver explained.

"Gotta get away from here before anybody comes to see what all the shooting's for. If they do, they won't find a thing except maybe a little blood scattered around in the dirt. One of the guards is taking the sedan some place far away, and he'll leave it there. The cops'll have another murder mystery on their hands

tomorrow." He laughed softly, with a note of steel.

And so, due to the efficiency of a Thomson sub-caliber machine gun capable of spraying one thousand .45 bullets per minute, the liquor arrived safely home at the depot. It had exacted its toll already on the first leg of its journey. The traffic must be served.

And during the long ride home Marty did not cease wondering once whether those men in the sedan actually were hijackers—or whether they happened to be officers of the law.

That was the closest Marty came to any stirring event during that week. The other evenings were monotonous. Equally monotonous became the unending poker game, the rough meals, the confinement of the house. Marty observed that some of the men disappeared for a day or two, and on their return were chaffed by the others about their women or their personal affairs. Seemingly the crew was held under no strict discipline, but enjoyed considerable freedom. The restriction to the house was observed only to screen their number from prying eyes. Marty, given no information about the matter, thought it over and decided it was time he enjoyed a holiday of his own.

After the evening meal eight days following his arrival at the depot, Marty approached Tommy Curtin at the table in the old dining room.

"Chief, how about a day off?" he inquired.

Curtin looked up from his plate, holding knife and fork upright.

"Sit down!" he barked, indicating a chair. "What do you mean, a day off? Haven't you every day off?"

Marty straddled the chair and grinned.

"Too much off. I want to see a little life. I got a girl—"

"Never mind the details. I've heard it before this."

"Well, how about a chance to get together with my sweet again?"

Curtin chewed deliberately for a moment.

"You understand how you came here, King?" he asked.

"Sure."

"Well, my orders are that you stay here till I hear otherwise."

Marty thought this over, frowning.

"What d'you mean—I don't get the same break as these other guys?"

"Not yet. Maybe when the boss gets used to you."

"The hell!" exclaimed Marty. "I'd be waiting at my funeral if I waited for him to get used to me. Nothing doing. I'm working the racket and doing what I'm told and I'm not going to be handed a lemon."

Curtin shrugged.

"Ain't my business! You stay here, young fellow me lad. Take my advice and get used to it fast."

"Oh, yeah!" said Marty, with rising inflection.

"Yeah!" mimicked Curtin. "And if you're feeling kind of hardboiled about it, just remember what happens to the smart guys in this business."

Marty turned and left the room.

Sober thought took hold of Marty after that interview. He did not mind remaining in the house for awhile yet; there were few places he could safely go, and no one he wanted to see now. His old haunts were out of the question, and he should at all costs avoid his old friends—Rose, Nig, the Cavanaughs. The sense of confinement by force galled him most. It restricted his field of activity and gave him no chance to carry the fight where he willed. It suggested many unpleasant possibilities difficult to forsee. It was possible, but not at all certain, that Trigger Mike contemplated using Marty as a trusted lieutenant once he was deeply enough involved in the racket. It was equally possible that he merely played with him before delivering the final crushing blow. The situation was one of imminent danger in any event.

Marty cruised about the house for a time before the trucks departed. Every window accessible to his scrutiny was barred. The doors below were pad-

locked. It was impossible, so far as he could see, to leave the house alone. And when he left it in the company of the others, he was under guard. It had not seemed so, recent nights, but Marty wisely suspected that a misstep on his part would have brought half a dozen of them on him with guns before he had taken a step in flight. The driver of his truck wore a .45 automatic in a shoulder holster and he probably had instructions to use it without hesitation. It was all perfectly simple, and to Marty damnably complicated!

That night but three trucks went out, and they visited another and smaller plant much nearer home. Marty went with them and had discharged his duty at one o'clock in the morning. He declined to sit in on the poker game, and went to the third floor, ostensibly to bed. He was alone on the floor at this early hour, and he put a rather desperate plan into instant action.

In the center of the ceiling on the third floor landing there was an oblong section which Marty recognized as a swinging ladder that could be pulled down for entry to the attic. The topmost part of the house was unused by its present tenants, and the ladder was left in place against the ceiling without means of pulling it down. Marty dragged a chair into the hall and stood on it. By heaving carefully on the end of the ceiling section, he dislodged the ladder, and its end swung down. Marty grasped it and hauled it the rest of the way. It rested on end on the floor and made a shaky but safe little staircase to the upper floor.

THE ATTIC was pitch dark. With the aid of matches, Marty groped his way about the dusty place. There were no windows on the sides of the sloping roof, but at the ends, just under the rooftree, there were small orifices for light and air. Marty went below for the chair and mounted to the tiny windows.

The one he examined first was not barred. It was jammed from years of disuse, but a few solid blows of his fist released it. It swung inward—and the way was open to the night.

There was still plenty of difficulty to be faced in the feat of reaching the ground. Below the window there was no foothold, and the drop from that height was much too risky to be chanced. Marty squirmed through the opening and studied the lay of the land. It was possible to clamber up on the roof. Marty emerged the rest of the way and tried it forthwith.

The shingle roof offered fair footing, and Marty explored its length. No easy method of descent offered itself. He remembered the long porch on the front of the house, with a sloping roof that should not be too difficult to reach. The room where the poker game was in progress opened on that roof, but he could take the farther end. Marty slid slowly down the incline of shingles until he reached the copper leaders along the edge. He felt in the dark for the corner, and there for the spout running down.

The metal was still strong and firmly attached to the roof, so in a moment Marty was dangling in space. He went down the copper pipe hand under hand, and soon his feet touched the porch roof. The windows nearby were dark; the glow of light from the poker game was safely along. Marty tiptoed to the edge of the roof, studied the ground below as well as he could and leaped. He landed upright and, pausing for no more than a brief survey of his surroundings, set out at a run for the tall line of hedges and the safety of the road.

Elation rode high in Marty's heart. He had his liberty, even if he was at something of a loss what to do with it. He had one weapon to wield against Trigger Mike, anyway. What a terrific monkey wrench he could throw into the nicely functioning machinery of the racket now, if it served his purpose!

Marty sprang back into the shelter of the hedges as he heard the sound of a car shifting from second speed to high and saw the far flung beams of headlights dancing in the roadway, coming from the

direction of the house. They could not have discovered his absence yet. The car rolled slowly out of the opening in the hedges and turned to the right. It was a sturdy little green coupé and it passed Marty at a sedate pace, obviously unconcerned with escaped semi-prisoners.

Marty stepped from his shelter and looked after the auto. It alone moved on the dark road in the quiet of this suburban neighborhood. The scattered houses showed no lights; all the natives were in bed. A block away, beneath a spreading maple tree, the deep blot of darkness of a parked car met Marty's eye. He shot forward toward it like a sprinter at the gun. It was a slim and precious chance. For the man in the coupé was Tommy Curtin, and the odds were ten to one that he was on his way to a conference with the boss.

Marty's heart sank at sight of the car beneath the maple. It was a battered old flivver, without a top and with no more than a vestige of paint. He leaped in the seat and pressed the starter. Nothing happened. He tried manipulating the switch, the spark and the lights, and still nothing happened. The red tail light of the coupé was yet visible down the road, but it was growing ever smaller. Marty jumped from the seat, ran to the front of the ancient flivver and gave the crank handle a turn. There was a gasp of hope. He spun the handle till the old wreck threatened disintegration. And then it responded. He had left the gas lever on, jamming it in place, and the motor roared like a battery of machine guns. It was sweet music to Marty. He landed in the seat with a flying leap, and set the car scurrying down the road as fast as its jaded mechanism could move it. The green coupé was not yet out of sight.

For half an hour Marty followed the green coupé. He followed at a distance, for no stealth was possible with his asthmatic vehicle. It took him into a more settled section of the town, a neighborhood of undistinguished, cheap homes where thrifty workers and small tradesmen dwelt. Nor very far away the long, soaring line of lights in the night marked the Bridge. It was an ideal though unexpected spot for Mike Como to hide in.

The coupé turned down a quiet side street and in a moment thrust its nose in a small driveway adjoining a white stucco house. Here too a hedge afforded precious privacy. Watching the lights through the foliage, Marty saw the coupé stop. The lights were turned off, a house door opened momentarily, and then all was dark and still. Marty halted the flivver near the corner and advanced on foot to inspect the white stucco house.

It was impossible to guess who might be the occupants. It looked like any other on the street, and Marty judged that more stolid, plodding virtue dwelt in these modest homes per individual block than anywhere else in the city. Yet the guile of Trigger Mike was equal to such a subterfuge. Marty carefully noted the number of the house, its exact location and returned to the mechanical wreck at the corner. The motor still functioned and he climbed in and went his way.

His way this time took him toward the lights of the mighty Bridge. Marty had need of help—instant need—and he knew of but one place to find the kind he wanted. If he had Trigger Mike Como cornered in a certain white stucco house, Nig Jonas was going to be in on the kill.

CHAPTER XI

RECONNAISSANCE

THE NEIGHBORHOOD was quiet and deserted at this hour, close to three o'clock. Only an infrequent patrolman or late homecomer was to be found on the streets, and except for the periodic roaring of an L train there was no sound. Marty's flivver chattered through the section, passing a couple of plodding milk wagons and came to rest in a dark, dank block not very far from the Barn. Marty got out, studied the numbers obscurely marked on the dimly lighted tenement doorways and entered

the dwelling he sought. He found himself in a long hall of worn oilcloth and green plaster walls, to which clung the aroma of forgotten meals.

Nig occupied a small flat on the third floor rear. There was no bell, and Marty knocked softly. This evoked no response. He knocked resoundingly, and soon heard footsteps within.

"Who's that?" demanded a deep voice.

"Marty King!"

The door opened instantly.

"Well, I'll be damned!" roared the big fellow, disheveled and still befogged with sleep. "Come in, come in this minute! Where you been?"

Marty entered. Nig closed the door and made haste to provide light. He ignited the gas fixture suspended from the ceiling. He was in pajamas and was bare footed, and Marty grinned at the spectacle. Nig grinned back at him, openly delighted to see Marty safe again.

"I've been doing a lot of traveling, Nig," Marty explained, "though I've never been very far away. I've come back because I think I got what I wanted."

"Pearl," Nig cried to an inner room, "get some clothes on and come out here. Get some coffee and grub going. It's Marty King!"

"Marty!" exclaimed a woman's voice. "Marty—for goodness' sakes! I'll be right out."

They made him welcome with an expansive hospitality that was warming to Marty's soul. He had scarcely realized until this moment how alone he was and how sore a task is the cutting asunder of all one's roots. His absence had been too brief and too full of eventful moments to allow him time to assay the changing values in his life. He felt a small pang of dread at the thought that his short exile might have continued without end.

"Where you been, Marty?" Nig demanded over the cups of steaming coffee served by Pearl Jonas. Pearl was a stout, red cheeked, merry eyed woman who was happy with her man and made no effort to conceal the fact. She joined them at the table.

"Goodness, Marty, you had us worried half to death. Tell us all about it."

As Marty narrated the events of the preceding week, Nig Jonas' eyes glowed with admiration for the efficiency of the working of the liquor run. It was probably no more than an accident that Nig drove a taxicab rather than a rum truck, for he found a zest in the latter much to his taste. Pearl, on the contrary, shivered, especially at the grim account of the stickup in which the Thompson gun was used.

"God," she said, "how can men do such things?"

"Hell," said Nig, a trifle regretfully, "it's all in the racket! And it sure must be an easy way to make a lot of jack."

"Is that so? Well, Mr. Jonas, we'll do nicely without the jack then."

Her voice was firm and her eyes sharp. Nig shrugged his big shoulders and grinned resignedly at Marty. Perhaps, after all, there was more than accident in the fact that Nig Jonas drove a cab.

"I broke away tonight," Marty continued, "busting through a window in the attic of the place. They didn't want to let me go, and that made me leery mighty quick. I helped myself to a flivver parked outside a house not far away, and I trailed this Tommy Curtin a couple of miles. His leaving the place when I did turned out to be a swell break, though I'd have shadowed the joint for days until I got a break like it, anyway. Curtin drove to a very ordinary looking house a few blocks over the Bridge and went inside. I don't know what's in the house, but I'll bet it's the place they took me to see Trigger Mike." He turned to Nig. "And you're the guy I want to have go over there and get the lay of the place. Can you do it?"

"You're right I can!" declared Nig. "And I'd sock any one said different!"

Pearl glanced at him and sighed hopelessly.

"All right, Sherlock Holmes, we know you're good, but nobody's told Mike Como yet. Take it easy."

"Don't worry, Pearl," assured Marty.

"There'll be no danger. Nig only has to get his cab and go to the place saying there was a phone call from there for a rig. If he acts dumb and insists on it, they'll get sore—not violent, mind, for Como don't dare—and I bet ten to one they spill the gravy somehow. They'll never suspect him."

"Well, he'll be good at that—acting dumb."

Nig raised his broad fist in a mock threat of annihilation, whereat she smiled maliciously.

It was agreed that Nig would start right on the moment, for Curtin's late visit suggested that the occupants of the stucco house did not retire early. Nig could get a cab at the Barn readily. Many drivers made it a practise to start the day before dawn. Marty would await his return. While they were discussing these plans, Pearl Benson slipped from the room and closed the door. The details were all settled when she returned.

Nig hurriedly slipped into his clothes and, pausing for no more than a brief kiss in Pearl's direction and a hearty grip of Marty's shoulder, he was gone. Marty settled into a comfortable armchair while Pearl washed the dishes.

"I met your girl, Marty," Pearl said casually.

Marty shot a glance at her in the suspicious manner of all males when a friend's wife makes that statement.

"Yes?"

"I think she's nice."

Marty lighted a cigaret, slowly.

"Nig brought her here the day you disappeared. Poor kid, she needed somebody to talk to, and Nig was no help! What are you going to do about her, Marty?"

Marty did not respond immediately. The cigaret, freshly lighted, twisted and crumbled in his fingers. There was no expression on his face.

"I don't know," he said.

She watched him covertly, wiping her hands dry. Then she crossed the room and placed a warm palm against Marty's cheek.

"Poor kids!" she said. "Don't worry, boy. She's crazy about you, and it's all going to turn out all right in the end."

"Yeah!" said Marty harshly. He could say it no other way; he did not dare.

Pearl recrossed the little room.

"Oh, there's something here Nig wanted to show you!" She returned with a photograph in a cheap, gilded frame. "I don't know who it is—somebody you know, I think."

Marty studied the picture. It was a stiff pose of a small, thin faced man in holiday attire. He had close set eyes and hair that looked bleached and colorless. A queer sensation ran up and down Marty's back.

"What's his name?" he demanded.

"I don't know. You'll have to ask Nig. He got it and left it here till he met you again."

"Jeez!" said Marty in a tense voice. "It's the rat. It's his face. It's the rat himself—and Nig knows him!"

"Who?" demanded Pearl.

"The guy that framed me in the beginning. If Nig knows how to lay hands on him, I'll put Trigger Mike Como to burn in the chair."

In the silence of the room there seemed to come a new presence, the wraith of a wild and quite unexpected hope.

They both started at a knock on the door.

"Who's that?" demanded Marty. "That can't be Nig."

A knowing look came on the woman's face.

"Stay right in that chair," she ordered. "It's nobody you need fear." She went to the door and drew it open.

Rose Shannon stood there, a look of inquiry on her face until her eyes lighted on the man in the armchair.

"Marty," she said, and came across the room to him.

MARTY was dumbfounded by Rose's visit at such an hour. His joy at seeing her was not unmixed, for he feared the encounter while his plans were yet unfulfilled. It was incredible that she should

have sensed his return to the neighborhood in the middle of the night.

"Rose," he said, rising and taking her hands. "How did you know?"

"Pearl phoned me a few minutes ago and told me. I got dressed and hurried right over."

Marty stared at Pearl Jonas. The woman smiled contentedly.

"You weren't paying attention when I slipped out of the room before Nig left. You didn't hear me, and I thought I'd let it be a surprise."

"It is."

The girl drew off her small felt hat and threw it aside.

"Where have you been, Marty?" she asked. "And what on earth have you been doing?"

They sat down in adjoining chairs. He looked at her and scarcely knew how to begin. He felt a diffidence concerning his adventures that he had not felt in relating them to Nig and his wife. But there was a calmness in the girl's eyes that was reassuring, a calmness that subdued yet did not obscure the fires of emotion that burned for him far within.

Marty repeated his tale, making it a narrative of simple facts. He said nothing of the night he had stared at the austere white moon in company with a dim hunger that knew no appeasing. He passed over the fears that had assailed him and the hot anger that had gripped his vitals at the sound of guns. He told of his discovery of the white stucco house, and of Nig's errand there tonight. Of the future and its hopes he had nothing to say.

The girl listened with interest and gave no sign of distress.

"It's going to work out all right, Marty. I know it will. What do you expect to do next?"

"That depends on what news Nig brings back."

"Why don't you go to the police. Surely they'll understand now."

"That would make a rat of me without clearing me a bit. They'd simply figure I was bargaining to get off easy on my own crimes."

Rose was unconvinced.

"Perhaps; but I wish you'd try anyway. Suppose you call up Macklin in the morning and have a talk."

"Oh—what's the use? They're down on me. They have to be."

"Never mind. You try it, will you?"

He shrugged.

"All right. But I certainly won't turn myself over to them. They won't be feeling kindly about my dodging them since the holdup. I have to be on my own to accomplish anything, and I want to go to them with the goods—clear and distinct and final."

They shied away from Marty's troubles as a topic of conversation after that. Pearl sensed their reluctance to talk further about it, and she regaled them with the gossip of the neighborhood, its humors and its scandals and its tragedies. They sat at seeming ease together, Rose and Marty, but the girl's eyes never left him and Marty's remained on a match which he turned over and over in his fingers.

Nig was gone a long time. Two hours passed before he returned. When his footsteps sounded outside and Pearl flew to the door, the pair sat up in still expectation. Nig entered the room with glowing eyes.

"It's all set, kid!" he said. "I found him. That's his hideout."

"How did you do it, Nig?" Marty demanded.

"Exactly as you told me. I busted in on them with a phoney call. I had it written on a piece of paper, but I didn't show them that yet. When I wouldn't beat it without satisfaction, they hauled me in the door and gave me the third degree. They thought I was a bull. The whole house was awake and there seemed to be hell to pay. I guess the liquor depot had phoned about your break from the attic. While they were talking to me and I was acting dumber by the minute, I saw standing in the shadows in the hall, watching, no less than Trigger Mike

himself. At that I flashed the slip of paper I had, proving that there was a call. But I had reversed the numbers, so the house I should have been looking for was way the hell and gone across the other side of the town. They gave up in disgust at that and kicked me out on my ear. I went off sore and swearing and came right back here."

"Perfect!" Marty nodded.

"Well, I got what you wanted. And now that you got it, what are you going to do with it?"

Marty considered, eyes narrowed with relish.

"I'm not yet sure," he said. "I think —I think I'm going to pull a fast one on Trigger Mike that will knock him three ways for a goal."

"What will it be?"

"Never mind. There's something else I want to talk to you about, big boy. Who's the guy in the fancy gold frame?" He picked up the photo which had been lying face down on the table.

"That?" said Nig. "Who does it look like to you?"

"It's the little rat that got me in my first jam. There's more story to it than you know."

"No, there isn't," said Nig easily. "Rose gave me the lowdown on the whole yarn and I put my head to work on it. I happened to know the guy in the picture. He used to be a hackman around here."

"Where is he now?"

"In the pen."

"In the pen? Impossible."

"Nothing like it. He's up on a two year stretch for burglary."

Marty stared at the photograph.

"The poor, spineless squirt!" he said. "They used him, and then shoved him into the pen to put him out of the way. And I suppose he hasn't the guts of a rabbit, not even enough to talk his way out."

Nig shrugged philosophically.

"What good would it do him? He knows he'd get bumped within twenty-four hours. The mob made that plain, you can be sure."

"Hm!" Marty reflected. "What's his name?"

"Eddie Mason."

Something clicked in Marty's memory. He could not place it, though he groped through an obscurity of things half forgotten in search.

"Remember the half starved woman and kid in the doorway of Dirty John's one afternoon?" prompted Nig.

Marty remembered suddenly. Nig had spoken the name then.

"That's his family," said Nig. "I went to see her later with a load of grub. It was there I got the picture. I took a chance and brought it along to let you give it a once over. My hunch was right."

"It was," agreed Marty. "And the case against Trigger Mike will be pretty soon complete!"

"And now, Mrs. Jonas," said Nig, turning balefully upon his wife, "what was that last crack about Sherlock Holmes?"

CHAPTER XII

THE ENEMY'S CAMP

IT WAS still quite early in the day when Marty, at Rose's urging, put through a telephone call for Tom Macklin. The detective's name was listed in the directory, and at this hour he would not yet have departed for the station. His voice came over the wire in response to the summons.

"Hello, Tom," said Marty. "Do you know who this is?"

"No. Who?"

"Think it over a minute. You've talked to me plenty—"

"Oh," said Macklin, "I get it now. Yes, I know who it is."

"You guys still looking for me?"

"We sure are. Are you going to get some sense, and come in?"

"I have sense to spare, and I'm not coming in."

"Well, what then?"

"I want to know if *you* guys are willing to be sensible. I've located Mike Como."

"You have?" exclaimed Macklin. "Boy, we've scoured the town for him. Where is it?"

"A bird in the hand is worth two in any cop's mitt," drawled Marty. "How about a little deal?"

There was a second's silence.

"Listen, Marty," the officer pleaded, "you know this racket. I can't make any genuine deal with you this way. Come on in and I'll do my damnedest to see that you get a real break."

"I appreciate all that, Tom, but you won't have a thing to do with it an hour after I surrender. It'll be me and the homicide squad, the strong arm squad, the loft squad and the whole blasted headquarters. And God help me!"

"Well—" Macklin was coldly resigned —"I don't see what I can do for you. The department will find Mike Como in good time, and you too, and there'll be no deal necessary."

"It's going to be too late when you flatfeet get around to it!" Ire mounted in Marty also. "I got a raw deal from you all before and I can't expect any better now."

"If you'd used your head and kept out of this Como business this time—"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you can't play the game both ends from the middle. You've got to run with the cops or run with Mike Como. If you chose to tie up with the wop you've got to pay the penalty."

"Damn you, Macklin!" said Marty between his teeth. "I could punch your face in for that. If you must be thick, find somebody else to try it on."

The receiver clicked in Marty's ear. Macklin had hung up.

Marty sprang away from the instrument and rushed into the other room. The three stared at him in silent dismay.

"Oh, why did you quarrel with him?" Rose demanded.

"Do you think I'm going to take that from anybody?" said Marty. "Running with Mike Como. Where's my hat?" He found it and thrust it on his head.

"Easy, big boy," cautioned Nig. "Where to now?"

"On the lam! It doesn't matter where. Macklin will probably trace the call and come hotfooting around here. I'm sorry I got you folks into it."

"Forget it," said Pearl calmly. "I'd like to see the flattie I couldn't handle."

Rose came around the table. She took his arms with her hands.

"Marty—dear," Suddenly her face became contorted and she threw herself on his breast with a sob. "Oh, Marty, I can't stand it. I hate myself, but I can't go on."

"It's O. K, Rose," said Marty. His own face was pale. "Everything's practically over now. I've got it all lined up."

"Nothing's O. K! Now you have both the mob and the police down on you. Como will be out to kill you, and the cops will have no mercy either. Merciful God, what—*what* are you going to do?"

"Don't, Rose! Don't you lay down on me now."

"Marty," she pleaded, staring earnestly into his eyes. "Let's go away. Right this minute. I have money. I've saved a lot. You could get a job in another city; we both could get jobs—"

"No."

He stood off; and his hands held her erect, away from him. His mouth was a long thin line, and his nostrils subtly flared.

"That's out! Completely and finally. I'll lick this town so that it stays licked, so help me, or it's going to lick me. The other's out—get it?"

She stared at him with eyes of despair and frustration. Then she turned away.

"All right. I get it."

He watched her. His whole manner suddenly changed.

"Rose!" he said. "Rose—don't send me away like this."

Swiftly she turned, dabbed at her eyes with a small handkerchief and smiled. She came to him frankly, put her arms about him and kissed him. His own arms went from his sides to close about her.

"I love you, Marty." A little shiver of

hysteria rippled over her frame. "God, how I love you! And what torture it is now! To let you go to—"

He closed his eyes and tried to shut out the world. But he could not.

"I love you, kid," he said, and then withdrew abruptly from her.

He went to the door.

"So long, Marty," said Nig. "Don't forget me. I'd like to go with you, but—"

"But you know I wouldn't take you, Nig. Let it go at that. You'll hear from me."

He opened the door and was gone, leaving the three of them standing in pity and wonder and torment in the little room.

Down on the street, Marty jumped into the flivver and made haste to depart. If the telephone call were traced and a visit to the Jonas flat was about to occur, Marty wanted to be far away. He headed downtown in a busy morning flood of trucks and taxicabs, bound nowhere, seeking only time for thought.

The situation was almost in his grasp. But that which yet remained to be done was the most difficult of all to accomplish. On the face of it, the simplest of measures would seem sufficient—to send a raiding party of cops to the white stucco house to seize Como and whatever other prey or loot the place contained. But the quarry was alarmed; his flight would be well prepared in advance. A party of police advancing bluntly on the house might meet a devastating bomb or a withering blast of machine gun fire. Mike Como would pause at no halfway measures at this desperate stage of the game.

In addition, what assurance had Marty that the police would advance in force? They were searching for Como, certainly, and every patrolman in the department was praying for the chance to make such an outstanding capture. But how about the higher-ups? How about the power that Mike Como so vaingloriously boasted? Might not some subtle, weighty influence paralyze any effective move against the racketeer? Mike Como was not the greatest figure in the city underworld, but he was a powerful baron under a still more powerful suzerain. The fine line dividing the enforcement of law from its frustration is forever to be an unknown quantity to the common man, and one more dangerous than a high tension wire to meddle with. Marty King, being of the city, and having been of it from birth, proposed to rely on nothing to aid him with certainty but his own wits and strength.

There was but one thing to do. Marty approached the conclusion with no little reluctance, though he had been aware of the fact from the start. He must go to Mike Como himself, alone. He must match guile with guile and stake everything on the outcome. More important than revenge against the gangster, more important than his capture, there still remained for Marty the paramount task of redeeming himself. And only through Como now could that be done.

Marty turned the flivver about in a narrow avenue far in the depths of the city and sent it speeding for the Bridge.

No sign of life was visible about the white stucco house, when Marty stopped the old car a few doors below and paused to survey it. It bore every appearance of suburban respectability — neatness, cleanliness and quietness. Marty slid from the auto seat and advanced along the sidewalk.

He went to the front door. The shade was pulled down inside. There was a bell button at the side of the door and Marty pressed it. Somewhere in the rear the bell reverberated faintly.

Marty knew he was under scrutiny and suspected that he had been observed by vigilant eyes from the moment he entered the block. He waited patiently. Suddenly the door opened and a man bade him enter. It was Ruffo, Mike Como's cousin and bodyguard.

"Hello, Frankie," said Marty easily. "The boss in?"

"Certainly," assured the other. He uttered the word with a soft hissing sound. "You come right inside."

THE door closed after Marty. He was in a darkened hallway, obscured by reason of the drawn shades. Another man leaned against the wall, arms folded, cigaret dangling from his lips. He watched Marty.

"You wait here," instructed Ruffo. He disappeared through a rear door, which he closed after him.

Marty returned the stare of the fellow leaning against the wall, grinned and examined his surroundings. All the doors leading from the hall were shut, so that little was to be seen. A staircase mounted to the second floor. There was a faded strip of carpet on the floor, plain, gray colored paper on the wall, a couple of chairs; nothing more.

Ruffo appeared again.

"Come in here," he ordered.

Marty followed through the door. He found himself in the same room he had visited blindfolded the week before. Beyond the table Trigger Mike walked to and fro, puffing in jerky fashion on his cigaret.

"So?" he said, with a familiar rasp in his voice. "You have come back?"

"Sure," said Marty. He walked to the table and inspected the box of cigarets.

"Have a smoke, Marty," he invited himself, and accepted. "Have a chair!" he further offered, and sat down. He struck a match and inhaled comfortably.

"How did you find this place?" demanded Como.

"What would you give to know, wop?"

Como mouthed an obscene epithet in his native tongue.

"What I give and what you give are two different things, Marty King. Be careful what you say."

"All right, no offense. What does it matter how I found this place? I'm here now and I want to have a little talk with you."

"First," snarled Como, "I will have the talk. Why did you leave Curtin's place where you were told to stay."

"Because I felt like it."

The gangster thrust forward his broad, low chin. His eyes were red rimmed from lack of sleep.

"What you like is going to cost you a lot of trouble. You answer my questions."

"All right." Marty sat up in business-like fashion. "I'll answer as much as is good for you. Remember we agreed we didn't trust each other, Como? I left that joint because I didn't trust you, and I found I had good reason not to. How do you think I found this hideout? You'd never guess! But you can try and guess how much else I found from the same source. I got the lowdown on enough of your racket to send you back to the pen for a hundred years."

Como smiled.

"Yes? What are you going to do with all this?"

"It's not what I'll do with it—it's what certain guys who are not very good friends of yours will do with it. You figure me as a cop, don't you? Well, you counted me out of the department thoroughly. I'm through there. But did you ever figure that in self-defense I'd line up with certain competitors of yours, Como? Did it occur to you that I might ask for a job so I could doublecross you with somebody other than the cops? You put the idea in my head when you offered me a job that night in my room. You wouldn't leave me alone, so I took measures to defend myself in the only way you could feel. It hits you, doesn't it? It hits you hard!"

Sudden, vicious suspicion hit Mike Como very hard indeed.

"Frankie, watch that door!" he snapped. He struck the table with his first and glared at Marty. "How have you doublecrossed me? Tell me, or I'll burn it out of you."

"Like hell I will!" snarled Marty. "That's my ace in the hole. Here's my proposition. I haven't doublecrossed you yet, but it would be a cinch to do it. I've got the connections. The dope is safe where I left it—so long as I'm safe. You try bumping me or taking me for any kind of a ride, and you cook your own

goose to a cinder. Now, if that penetrates, we can have our talk."

Mike Como sat down, his gaze fixed on Marty. Over by the door Frankie Ruffo stood his post in somber stillness. Marty returned Como's stare with hard assurance. Every muscle in Marty was electric with tension, but on his face there was only repose.

"Go ahead," said Como. "Let me hear you talk."

"I'll keep my mouth shut," said Marty, "on condition that I'm left alone. You didn't believe that I wanted only to be left alone before. Maybe I can convince you now."

"Leave you alone, Marty King? Never! You don't want to be left alone." Como spoke softly, with sinister restraint. "You got to be with me or against me. I know your kind too well. You make good cops—or good crooks."

"Well, I make a lousy crook, and I can't be a cop. What can I be?"

"Marty King, you would make a very fine corpse," said Como slowly.

For a moment there was silence, utter and complete silence. Then the gangster's throaty voice resumed.

"You can't bluff me, King. I don't care how much you know. You couldn't know all there is to know about me. Nobody knows that but myself. And these enemies of mine you speak of couldn't really touch me. I can't tell how you found this house, but that matters very little. What you learned about the liquor run matters very little too. These are small things." He paused. "I have been through gang wars before and come out on the top, Marty King. I have met rats before and dealt with them, and they have troubled me no more. It is very simple." He paused again, his eyes afire. "Frankie—" he said.

Then the table uprose suddenly in Como's face. As he sprang back, it crashed upon him, sending him to the floor. Marty, having come out of his chair like a catapult to propel it with that sudden, mighty heave, swung about. The room was small. Frankie Ruffo, by the door, had his gun already out. But the room was small, too small. Marty closed in and feinted. Frankie ducked even as he sought to pull the trigger. He ducked directly into a smashing right fist that struck like a hammer. There was a sound of something breaking, and Frankie crashed headlong against the door. The house timbers shook with the force of the impact. Frankie was out of the argument on the instant.

Marty landed on Mike Como with a dive. The gangster was squirming from beneath the upturned table, gun in hand. Marty caught a grip on his wrist before the gun went into action. He gave it a crushing twist. Como executed a neat and very neeessary backward somersault and went at Marty's shoulders tooth and nail.

Marty could not secure the gun. The racketeer was short, but he was powerful and he fought like a demon, screaming curses at his antagonist and orders to the others in the house to come to his assistance. Marty sensed his danger quickly. There was no time to fight for possession of the pistol. He reared erect, released the gangster's wrist suddenly and, seizing his body in a quick grip, flung him off to the floor.

Como squirmed about to an effective position to use the gun, but Marty was gone. He had jerked open the closet door behind the table and leaped within. The door slammed after him. Como leveled the gun and sent shot after shot streaking into the thin wooden panels. The hall doorway was jammed with men storming to the rescue.

"You damn fools!" Como shouted at them. "You damn fools, he's in there with the machine guns!"

They stood paralyzed with indecision and horror.

Marty's first thought was given to the bullets certain to follow him through the closed door into the closet. He crouched on the floor against a side wall, and the missiles from Como's pistol came nowhere near him. It was a capacious closet, much wider than the door.

Feeling desperately about among the

racks on the wall, Marty found his first need. Hanging from above in the darkness there were several leather holsters containing automatic pistols. He secured one of them, jerked back the slide and pulled the trigger. There was instant explosion, and a jet of orange flame leaped toward the door. Marty fired twice again to serve warning.

There were other things in the wooden racks. There was a heavy bit of mechanism which Marty's unaccustomed touch did not at first identify. It was not a mystery long. The double, carved handgrips disclosed its nature. It was a Tommy gun, oiled and stripped for action. At the base of the rack there was a heavy round can that rattled when Marty touched it. It made the gun complete, for it was a magazine containing one hundred cartridges. Marty had handled the Thomson gun before he lost his uniform, and he slipped the drum to its underslung position below the breech of the gun and snapped it in place. One finger found the safety catch, and threw it off; found the fire control lever and swung it to rapid fire. He jerked back the bolt and cocked the piece. Then he pulled the trigger experimentally, and the dark closet was made light and thunderous with the burst of explosions that issued from the muzzle.

Marty got to his feet. For a second he stood listening. He could hear nothing, perhaps because the terrific sound of the detonations in that small place had dulled his ears. He raised a foot and delivered a kick at the door. It flew open and wide and revealed nothing but darkness. The light had been extinguished.

Lowering his body, Marty turned the machine gun loose in the room. There was a scream, the stamping of feet and the overturning of chairs, and in return to his fire, a desperate fusillade of shots in his direction. One bullet clipped the muscles of Marty's neck. Then the return fire ceased. The house resounded with the sound of running feet. Light suddenly filtered into the room as a door was opened elsewhere.

Marty sprang from the closet and crossed the room. He gripped the velvet hangings on a window with one hand and tore them from their supports. Daylight flooded the room. Two men lay sprawled on the floor nearby. Marty gave them no notice, but thrust his head out through a hole he smashed in the window glass. He was none too soon. This was the side of the house on which opened the little driveway. There was a car there and a man was throwing himself behind the wheel. Another crowded on his heels. The second man was Mike Como.

Marty brought forward the Thomson gun and jerked the trigger. A burst of bullets tore through the engine hood and thoroughly wrecked the motor. The man at the wheel ducked to the car floor and Mike Como darted back inside the house. Marty turned from the window, delivered another burst at the doorway across the room and charged toward it.

"Come on, you gorillas," he shouted. "Come and get it."

But they were fleeing up the stairs. Two of them paused at the head of the flight and pumped their automatics at Marty. A torrent of lead splintered the banister below them and they vanished.

The house became a shambles. Marty dominated the hallway and maintained his dominion by a barrage of bursts of fire of two or three shots each. His ears rang with the thunder of the reports, and his face was livid with the fury of blood lust. All the pent-up hatred and wrath of weeks and months broke loose and swept like a madness through his veins. He shouted for Trigger Mike to come and talk it over now. He cursed the gangster with epithets that included three generations of his forebears.

Marty's preoccupation was such that he failed to see the figure crawling in the doorway of the room so recently emptied. It was Frankie Ruffo, grimly enduring the agony of a broken jaw. Lying on the floor, he steadied his automatic and pulled the trigger. It was a pointblank shot, impossible to miss.

Marty felt a white hot blow in his side.

It jerked him about, and he staggered against the wall. A paralysis crept over his body; the gun dropped and he could not raise it. He stared in despairing horror at the prone figure on the threshold; at the pistol in that weakly leveled hand. But Frankie Ruffo had shot his bolt. He fainted, and the automatic dropped gently to the floor.

Marty turned and tried to make his way to the front door. He slid along the wall and the machine gun fell to the floor. There were shouts of wonder above, anxious and hopeful. Marty took hold of the door knob with intense effort. He could not turn it, try as he might. He heard another door open behind him, and a vicious, exultant curse.

Then came the sound of running feet and a shrill cry of alarm. The front door burst open in his face, throwing him aside. The daylight was blotted out by great shadows that were men—men in blue uniforms with shiny badges.

"Trigger Mike!" Marty uttered desperately. "Trigger Mike—"

He toppled forward limply into the grasp of strong, protecting arms.

CHAPTER XIII

VINDICATION

MARTY awakened in a white, clean smelling room he had never seen before. The awakening was slow, like the gradual emergence from a fog. Long before he could arrange his confused thoughts in proper order, Marty was aware that he was not alone and that the gentle face so solicitously bent over him and the soft hands soothing his groping fingers belonged to Rose Shannon. Her presence seemed the most natural thing in the world and it quieted the troubled mental seas in which he floundered.

Neither Rose nor the others about would answer his questions when he finally was able to voice them. They urged him to sleep, and oddly he found sleep claiming him. His second awakening occurred much later, and when he opened his eyes and knew that Rose was still with him his brain was clear and his memory unconfused.

"Where am I?" he asked. "This a hospital?"

"Yes, Marty." She smiled. "Feel better now?"

"I guess so." He moved experimentally and discovered that his side was tightly bound. "What did they do to me?"

"They took a bullet out of you. A rib saved your life. The doctor says it will heal quickly and cleanly."

He looked at her with uncertain eyes.

"And am I—under arrest?"

She gave his hand a squeeze.

"You are not under arrest. In fact, you're a hero this morning. All the papers have your picture on their front pages and long stories of your battle with the machine gun."

"Tell me what happened," he bade her.

She told him in a few words, with mingled diffidence and self-satisfaction. Immediately after his departure from Jonas' the day before, she had defiantly gone to the telephone and called Tom Macklin. As Marty guessed, Macklin was in the process of tracing the previous call. Rose had argued and pleaded with him and won him to a more level headed consideration of Marty's case. Then she had told Macklin the entire story, throwing herself on his mercy and understanding. Macklin had agreed to suppress certain features of it which might prove embarrassing, such as Marty's voluntary service on the liquor run, and promised to organize a raid on the white stucco house immediately. At that point the conversation ended.

How Macklin succeeded in stirring the department to such quick action, none of them knew. There was no doubt that impediments would have appeared had the raid been organized more deliberately. Mike Como's agents, wielding the secret influence which is essential to the life of any mob, would have seen to that. But however watchful, they had no warning that morning. Tom Macklin and

Captain Hammacher smashed a dozen sacred precedents, and in half an hour two fast police cars were on their way to the quiet little white house beyond the Bridge.

The raiding party had arrived on the scene while the thunder of automatic gunfire still echoed within the house. Windows up and down the street were studded with the heads of alarmed, excited watchers. They had piled out of the machines at the curb and rushed the house, surrounding it and breaking in the doors, front and rear. Tom Macklin, taking the van of the frontal attack, had found Marty wounded and dazed in the hallway with Mike Como in a nearby door leveling his pistol for the shot of execution. Macklin's service revolver had spoken first. Como went down with a bullet that tore open his throat and lodged in his spine. He spoke not another word and was dead before the first ambulance arrived.

"So they got him?" said Marty.

"Yes," said Rose.

"Before he had a chance to pass them the word about me!" A faintly bitter smile crossed Marty's face. "I wanted that guy alive. He's not much use to me or anybody now."

"What does it matter, honey? It's far better that he is gone."

"Think so? Where do you think it leaves me? The mob will scatter now, and every one of them will die before they'll admit knowing a thing about me or any of the things that have happened. I'm left in the same place as before—the police won't press any charges against me, but I won't have a shred of evidence to clear myself. They'll give me the old Scotch verdict—not proven."

"Oh, Marty, I don't care," she said earnestly. "The only thing that counts is that Como is gone and you need no longer fear him. What does the rest matter?"

"What does it matter?" he echoed. "What do you think took me back to Como's yesterday morning? Why do you think I gambled on a slender chance, and lost, and faced the whole mob all alone with a captured gun in my hands? Do you think that was for nothing?" He turned his face away.

The girl was silent. Her hands continued to stroke his, gently, soothingly.

"Marty," she said in a very low voice after a time, "it can't matter to me. Nothing can possibly matter except that you're safe again."

He smiled and essayed with ill success to shrug a very sore shoulder.

There were visitors presently. They knocked on the room door and entered quietly, three grave men who looked at him with unsmiling faces. There was Nig Jonas, his big body somewhat ill at ease in these awesome surroundings; there was Tom Macklin, impassive, so competent looking, level eyed; and there was Captain Hammacher. It was impossible to read the latter's thoughts from the formidable expression on his face.

They shook hands with him, the captain last.

"You did a fool job in excellent fashion, King," he said. "You're a sick man now, and I won't give you the whole of my opinion of it. All I'll say for the present is this: you were wanted by the department for many days, and you evaded apprehension. You are not under guard here, but I shall expect you to report to the station as soon as you're on your feet. They tell me they expect to discharge you within two days. I want you to show up at 4:00 in the afternoon the day after tomorrow."

"I'll be there, Captain," said Marty.

For the next forty-eight hours a very silent man lay recuperating in that clean white room. Rose was in almost constant attendance, but there was little talk between them. Marty was in the grip of a weariness of soul; his body mended fast and his smile was as ready as ever, but his heart was not in it. He refused to read the newspapers and declined to discuss his case with any one. It made little difference that they chose to make a hero of him. The city demanded its sensa-

tions, gloated over them for a time and then forgot them. It knew nothing of the real fight Marty had waged, nor could it understand the defeat that rankled within him.

The mob was destroyed, that had been definitely ascertained. As with most such organizations, it had been a one man gang, a criminal ring sitting eternally on a figurative powder barrel. The decapitation of its head had killed the whole body, and all its vaunted power and influence vanished into thin air on the instant. Even the liquor run was abandoned. A raid on the old house behind the hedges rewarded the police with only a dismantled bottling apparatus in the cellar. The trucks were gone, the men were gone, every drop of whisky was gone. Marty said nothing about the locations of the "farms" far out on the island. They were of no interest to him; they had transacted deals with Mike Como, but were not inherently a part of his racketeering, his dope smuggling, his killings and his feuds.

Close to 4:00 in the afternoon the third day after the memorable battle in the white stucco house, Marty was riding uptown from the hospital in Nig Jonas' cab. Macklin was with him, a quietly smiling, tolerant and encouraging Macklin. He sought to prepare Marty for what was about to occur.

"Buck up, kid!" he urged. "You're completely in the clear. The Old Man is delighted the way things have turned out. He's been sweating day and night on your case. They brought Eddie Mason down from the penitentiary and threw the fear of God into him. And now that Como's gone and his mob is on the lam for healthier climates, Eddie worked up sufficient nerve to talk. That murder in the speakeasy happened exactly the way you figured it and a warrant is out for Twist Anderson for shooting the guy. He was a racketeer who had hijacked a load of Como's stuff. The fact that you were working on Como's case and were deliberately framed puts an entirely different light on that 'neglect of duty' charge. And that's all that matters; you just forget about everything else. All Mike Como's influential friends will be mighty anxious to fight shy of any further connection with him, now that he's gone."

"Well," said Marty, "I'll be able to hack my rig in peace now anyway."

Macklin laughed shortly and placed a hand on Marty's shoulder.

"No doubt about it, boy!"

The cab turned a corner and coasted to a stop before the old brownstone station. It was unable to pull up at the curb, for the sidewalk was lined with automobiles.

"All right, Marty; all out!" said Macklin. "Nig, you shove along and park the rig somewhere down the block and follow us inside."

Marty and Tom Macklin squeezed through the line of cars and walked up the station steps. The detective shoved open the door and ushered Marty inside. On the threshold Marty stopped. Within the doors, all along the wall across from the desk, the patrolmen of the station were ranged in serried ranks. They made a formidable sight, and a dim resentment stirred in Marty's heart at the public display organized for the occasion. He walked into the station with the eyes of a hundred men on him.

Out of his office Captain Hammacher issued, notified immediately of Marty's arrival. There was a man with him, a tall, impressive individual in striped trousers and formal black coat. The man looked at Marty, and Marty stared back for a moment. Then, almost unconsciously, his hand rose in salute. The city commissioner of police was on hand for his surrender.

"This is Martin King, Commissioner," said Captain Hammacher.

The commissioner advanced. He gave Marty a prolonged, sharp scrutiny. Then he held out his hand and pressed Marty's in a strong grip.

"I have wanted, personally," he said, "to congratulate you on your courage, and to right an unwitting wrong the department has done you. The courage you displayed is the sort that has created all

the noble traditions of what I am proud to believe is the finest police force in the world. I asked Captain Hammacher to have you here this afternoon that I might notify you of the complete dismissal of charges against you, of your reinstatement to active duty, with full back pay from the time of your discharge, and also of my intention of including you in the next departmental citation for awards of the medal of merit."

It was a long speech for such a moment. The commissioner was a busy man and it was his custom to come to the point, so that the speech was not a word longer than was necessary. Marty gathered the general drift of his utterances, though he could not remember a single word an instant after it was pronounced. He stood by while the commissioner addressed the ranks of uniformed men against the wall, further amplifying the formal sentiments of the occasion for their edification; but of that address Marty heard nothing. He was chiefly aware that his convalescence was not quite over; that his weakened body maintained itself erect with difficulty; that there was an odd roaring in his ears; and that Macklin's arm practically supported him.

Then the commissioner departed. Captain Hammacher allowed the men to break ranks, and they crowded about Marty in the center of the floor. There were ardent hands thrust at him to grip his own, hearty words of congratulation filled his ears, and by sheer weight of numbers the incredible fact of his return to honorable station was impressed upon him.

Captain Hammacher, smiling a broad, solicitous smile, for this occasion was one much to his liking, took Marty's free arm.

"Come on inside for a while, lad," he urged. "You're looking kind of rocky. It's been a big day."

"Captain," said Tom Macklin, on the other side of Marty, "if it's all the same to you, Marty has an engagement I think he'd like to keep now."

The officer looked at Macklin.

"Oh!" He seemed to read correctly the detective's face. "Surely! Run along, boy, and report to me for duty when you're quite on your feet. I'll be looking for you."

"Thank you, sir," said Marty. "I shall."

They started for the door. Nig had appeared from somewhere.

"We'll run down to my place," he told Marty. "Pearl has a swell feed all set for us, and I have a nip of old rye that no bootlegger ever touched, to put new life in you!"

"I don't know—" said Marty.

"Don't say a word, kid. It's all set."

"Yes, I know. But there's something—"

They were at the cab. Macklin opened the door. Marty's uncertain objections ceased. In the cab sat Rose Shannon, watching him with shining eyes.

"Hello, Marty," she said. "I'm going with you; do you mind?"

Without a word Marty climbed in beside her.

Tom Macklin slammed the door. He turned to Nig Jonas, and his left eyelid winked once.

"All right, Jonas. Take care of them."

"I'll do that," grinned Nig. "And we'll be looking for you and the captain later. If you come in time there'll be a drop left for both of you."

Macklin waved a hand in silent acknowledgment.

Nig jumped behind the wheel, started the motor, and the cab moved down the block to the avenue. In the late afternoon press of traffic there was the honking of many horns, the indignant objurgations of sweating truckmen, the clanging of trolley bells, the roaring of mighty motors—all the clamor of the city's never ending turmoil.

But within the battered taxi, unheeding, there was a silence and a blessed peace.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A NOTE from Harold Lamb, in connection with "The Trial of the Templars," in this issue. This piece, as you know, concludes his series of true stories of the Crusades. His next efforts for our pages will be, he expects, some more of his colorful tales of the Don Cossacks, which so many of you have been asking for.

Piedmont, California

One last word about the Crusaders. In my books, and in the *Adventure* narrative, I've tried to show the men and the happenings of that time as they actually were. To do this, I used the chronicles of that time—leaving out present day opinion.

Recently, however, the Crusaders have come in for debunking, along with other characters of the past. In the last generations we've been fed up a bit too much with heroics, and the present tendency to kick down pedestals is a healthy one, so long as it is honest and intelligent kicking.

The debunkers say something like this: "The Crusades were a vain undertaking, a mistake, resulting only in waste of lives and treasure. The Crusaders themselves, instead of being saints in arms turned out to be human sinners, who massacred and pillaged, while they made of their idealistic Kingdom of God around Jerusalem a kind of robbers' roost. They were really adventurers, who became degenerate and lost everything."

SOME cynics say one thing, some another. But their point of view is pretty much the same. And in this case it is wrong. Because you can't lift men out of the twelfth century and set them down beside men of today, for comparison. Not that the world today is any Utopia. But the comparison is meaningless.

As to the question of the gain and loss in the Crusades, the wisest of the historians admit that they can not answer it. We have no scales vast enough to weigh the inventions and the knowledge that came out of the great venture, against the destruction of goods and life.

Nor is modern civilization, which has seen itself torn asunder by a world war, without apparent cause, entitled to cast a stone at the Crusaders, who fought for what was to them the greatest of earthly causes.

REMEMBER, to the men of that time, the Crusades triumphed for more than a century. Whole peoples were torn loose from their isolation and merged with their fellows. Men who had been to the East returned with new knowledge—the rudiments of the knowledge that gave birth to the Renaissance thereafter, to the era of voyages of discovery. Four centuries before the first voyages, the Crusaders set out, over the sea to Outremer. And long before the first modern European *entente* the Crusades brought about the first international alliance.

As to the Crusaders themselves, they were a cross-section of the humanity of the time; if anything, they were the best with the worst. And the debunker errs when he assumes that they looked upon the venture as a kind of short cut to salvation. The Church granted them absolution from their sins during the time of the Crusade—usually fixed at three years—because the *danger of the venture was so great.*

MANY of them, of course, hoped to carve a fortune for themselves in the East. Beside a Godfrey of Bouillon you will find a Bohemund; and with a Coeur de Lion, a Conrad of Montserrat. That happens in any great movement. And far outnumbering the fortune-seekers were the multitude who sold or pawned their possessions at home to pay their way on Crusade, and brought back nothing but memories with them.

They were adventurers, no doubt of that. Probably—except for the Vikings and Varangians who formed clan units—they were the first massed adventurers. Certainly the first recruited from all nations to take part in a single enterprise. They paid their own way and put their lives at hazard for a cause. Of course they pillaged and took land where they found it—women too, at times. How else were they to live in that age when commissaries and pay days were things undreamed of?

But the kingdom they founded and held—Antioch was held for two centuries—knew more peace than the countries of Europe. There were quarrels in Jerusalem, but worse in Rome or Paris or Venice. And their code of laws, the *Assizes,* is now looked upon as the model of the early Medieval Age.

THE Crusaders have been accused of callous massacres. When they first penetrated the East they killed without discrimination, but they stopped this as soon as they found out that the Moslems were human beings very much like themselves, and not servants of Anti-Christ as they had been taught. Moslem chroniclers do not accuse them of any massacre except the slaughter at the capture of Jerusalem.

The Crusaders who settled beyond the sea became colonists in earnest, and adapted themselves to their surroundings and the peoples of the East. They were exploited by the Italian merchant-republics, upon whose fleets they were dependent, and by the Church of Rome, which turned the Crusades into armed movements against enemies and heretics at home, leaving the exiles in Outremer to fare as best they could.

THAT they should lose their conquests was inevitable, when the new masses of Moslems, trained in the Mongol method of fighting, came against them from the East. At the end they were dozens against hundreds—garrison posts against armies. Degenerate they were not.

Their devotion and their chivalry cast a light upon an age otherwise dark and grim and treacherous. No words of ours can alter what these men did. They reached the summit of daring. They drained the cup to the very dregs of suffering and shame. They followed the light of their star, until they died. And in spite of all that modern cynics can say, the Crusades will always remain a cherished memory.

—HAROLD LAMB

A GOOD word for *pulque,* the popular fermented beverage of our southern neighbors:

San Salvador, Salvador, Central America

In your Jan. 15 edition under Mexico (Page 187), the description of *pulque* is quite accurate, but it is untrue that the moderate drinking of *pulque* is bad for the health. The contrary holds true, and people who drink *pulque* regularly and moderately seem to live to a ripe old age. In large quantities, say over a quart a day, it may be harmful, but even water in immoderate quantities drowns the drinker.

Pulque, for example, is beneficial to the blood, it tones up the system, it prevents diabetes (no one ever has it who drinks *pulque*), it is claimed to benefit greatly high blood pressure, improves the eyesight, benefits and heals the kidneys and is the *best known cure* for Bright's Disease. Even doctors in New York and Chicago, who know of this, send patients to Mexico to drink *pulque*—one or two quarts a day—and nothing else. Except in the last stages of Bright's Disease, it is said to cure. The writer has tried it for the eyes with good results.

IT TAKES over a gallon of *pulque* to make a man intoxicated. People who have not lived in Mexico often mix up *pulque* with *mescal.* The latter comes from double distilling *pulque* and is intensely intoxicating and dangerous. A water glass of *mescal* might kill a white man, although Indians

grow more hardened to it; but even they do not revive if they drink too much.

Tequila is the form between the mild *pulque* and strong *mescal* and is quite as strong as whisky.

It never deadened my brain any, and I took *pulque* with my meals (cured with orange juice and orange peel as it is delightfully mixed) for several years, and never felt the least intoxicated. The *aquamiel* or unfermented juice as it is taken from the maguey plant is given to children and babies to make them strong and is fine for invalids.

—CAPT. ATHOL C. MACNAIR

PAUL ANNIXTER, who wrote "The Burnished Trail," in this issue, rises to make his bow before the Camp-fire:

Los Angeles, California

The subject of this sketch was born thirty-three years ago in Minneapolis, Minnesota. My first big work, entitled "The Life of an Acorn," was completed at the age of eight and consisted of three large closely scrawled pages out of an old scrap book. A second and third work quickly followed, one dealing with the death and disintegration of an old oak tree in our yard, the other a blood curdling history of Simon Girty, the white renegade, and his redskin army. My grandmother was the only one who found worth or promise in these pieces.

At eighteen I left school, and unhandicapped by any college education or scholastic honors, took a post-graduate course in that greatest of all schools for a writer—the Open Road. For nearly three years I threw in my lot with the continental ramblers and "gay cats," crossing and recrossing this country and Canada in loops and figure eights, two or three times getting down into Sonora. Here and there I would work awhile, then move on. This, of course, was before the Interstate Act took the kick and the chanciness out of the game.

Vagabondage is a queer, between-things sort of world, not quite criminal, not quite anything, and from its ungeographical outlook one learns the world as from no other vantage point. He is kept constantly sharp, pliant and untabulated; also the road gives one the common touch in a way he is never apt to lose. Color soaks into him night and day, events spring out at him from the ambush of the most commomplace circumstances. I wouldn't part with that road experience for the best indoor education they are putting out.

FOLLOWING this period I tried my luck at homesteading north of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and again in central Alberta. I was always an ardent hunter, and it was during this period that I had the rare fortune of joining a hunting party going up into the Peace River country when that virgin wonderland was first opened up by the Canadian government. Never, I think, outside of the great African game plains, has a more perfect hunter's paradise existed. Indians in the region had always been scarce; the game had not even learned to be manshy.

I sold my Canadian land shortly afterward and put in a year and a half on a timber claim in northern Minnesota. Here I did a deal of trapping and hunting on the side and began seriously to write fiction with intent to sell. I had written on and off all the time, hiding my activities in general from friends and practical minded relatives alike, like a secret shame, for no one had faith in the outcome. I was offered help and chances if I would "come to" and go into business, but the virus was too strong. Writing was always the biggest of all games to me, and I didn't pick on it as the *sine ictu* either, for I've always held that writing was the hardest work in the world.

IT WAS in 1917 that I sold my first story. That was about the biggest day I ever lived. I burned my bridges behind me and settled down to write in earnest. That first story, by the way, was an animal story. I have written many human stories since, but the animal tale always intrigued me most. Animal stories marked the beginning of all literature. The first teller of tales to give narrative a form to outlast the spoken word hammered the pictorial story of his tribe's hunting on the rock wall of his cave. His pen and typewriter were a rock mallet and a chunk of obsidian. History began there.

In animal tales a new and intimate world is created in which animals find actual psychological expression as personalities and individuals, and the resultant tearing away of the veils between our world and theirs advances the boundaries of intuitive and spiritual knowledge to degrees of which we hardly dare dream—PAUL ANNIXTER

A FEW words on West Indian fetish worship by James Mitchell Clarke, of our writers' brigade. Comrade Clarke, as many of you are aware, used to hold down a chair in our editorial offices not so very long ago.

San Diego, California

I note some discussion in Camp-fire and elsewhere of *Voodoo, Brujeria* and *Náñigismo.* A Havana lawyer named Fernando Ortiz is probably the world's leading authority on West Indian negroes, their customs and religions. He started to study this subject as a problem in criminology and became interested as an anthropologist. He has written several books on these negroes in Spanish, and now projects a twenty volume work, which will say just about all that is to be said. I met him in Havana in 1929 and was tremendously impressed.

Ortiz says in "Los Negros Brujos" (Madrid, 1917) that the word *Brujo* is an approximation of the West African word for fetishism. It is a rather high type

of religion, in which the "Great Spirit" *Oroluñ* rules over all, has no material manifestations and no image —much like God or Allah, with whom he is often identified in Northwest Africa.

There is a lesser trinity, having physical manifestations and worshiped in the form of idols—*Obatalá, Shangó,* and *Ifá.* This form of fetish worship was brought to Cuba by the Yoruba negroes, known there as *lucomis.* The *Náñigo* secret societies are a branch of the *Brujo* cult. One hears wild tales about them in Cuba. *Voodoo,* as nearly as I can gather from Ortiz, is a cult of Dahomey; at least the serpent worship practised in Cuba during the early days of slavery bore a strong resemblance to Dahomey ceremonies. *Voodoo* is not strong in Cuba.

The *bongo* in Cuba is very common. One sees *bongos* in all the native dance orchestras. It is a small kettledrum, the bottom of which is heated by a spirit lamp between numbers. It gives a sort of slurring boom, one of the strangest sounds I ever hope to hear.

The spelling of negro words I have taken from Ortiz. —JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE

GENERAL DE NOGALES replies to Comrade Thomson's letter, in a recent issue, relative to the War on the Eastern Front:

Washington, D. C.

In regard to Mr. Thomson's letter to Camp-fire as to whether I was with the Turkish force which demonstrated before Bir-es-Sabah on October 28, 1927, I regret to state that I was not. At that time I was acting as Inspector of the Cavalry of the Second Army in Diarbekir, in northern Mesopotamia.

From what I heard afterwards from comrades of mine who took part in the "fall of 1917 campaign," that demonstration of ours before Bir-es-Sabah, on October 28th, led to some corking good fights. I am sorry I was not present. I would have enjoyed them very much.

As to the exact number of British cavalry regiments which participated in the rear guard action of our 3d. Cav. Division at Daharieh, on Nov. 25, 1917, maybe Mr. Thomson is right when he states that there were only six. Our 3d. Cav. Div. had only three, reduced to fifty per cent. of their original strength, because by that time we had ceased disposing of the necessary reserves to fill in our gaps. When the gentlemen of our staff at Nazareth informed me that British cavalry outnumbered ours at Daharieh to the tune of three or four to one, they must have included in their estimate the different enemy cavalry units echeloned along the Daharieh-Bir-es-Sabah military road and along the foothills of Palestina Mountains, west of Daharieh, and of which the British cavalry at Daharieh probably was the vanguard. I think Mr. Thomson's way of expressing himself about the Turkish soldier is extremely gallant. As a former Turkish soldier I wish to thank him very cordially for his courtesy.

—RAFAEL DE NOGALES

CERTAINLY no sport for squeamish persons is knife throwing. Here is a letter by a fan commenting on Mr. Charles H. Coe's article on the subject in the Jan. 15th issue:

Hastings-on-Hudson, N. Y.

Have just been down cellar trying out Mr. Coe's method of knife throwing, and regret to say I prefer my own. I started flinging a knife when I was eleven and kept it up pretty steadily until I was twenty. I never could hit the ace of hearts at every shot; but at fifteen feet could put three knives of different types inside an eight inch circle.

I can not pose as an expert, but I must differ with Mr. Coe on his principle of turning the knife on a throw. The less turns a knife makes, the simpler it is for both the mind and eye to follow the course of the throw. Any boy who plays mumble-de-peg can flip a jack-knife into the ground, using a half turn. With a larger knife and grasping more of the blade, a throw can be made up to twenty feet, still using but a half turn, but the blade must be held flat side towards the target, between the thumb and forefinger, rigidly. This grip checks the tendency to turn too much. For a twenty foot throw I bring the right foot forward as in pitching a ball, putting plenty of beef behind the throw, right arm extended to full length as knife leaves hand, bringing the arm down in a vertical line with the target. The turning of the knife is almost wholly regulated by the "feel" as it leaves the fingers. Holding the blade flatways as it is released gives a better bearing on the lateral line of the target.

THE longer the knife the better the control; at twenty-five to thirty feet a pal of mine could drive a scythe blade through a garage door at every throw, using both hands and turning the blade only a half revolution.

Let no man stand near the target if it is a tree or pole—a knife will ricochet as hard as it is thrown. I was very nicely hamstrung by a rebounding knife which took me right above the knee.

Sport of a destructive kind may be had by taking turns throwing at each others knives; and believe me there is a lot of satisfaction in chewing up the other fellow's knife handle, be it leather, bone or wood. The beginner throwing from ten feet will be surprised at the accuracy with which his knife seems drawn to another in the target.

I write the above with all respect to C. H. Coe, hoping that it will be acceptable around the Camp-fire, where both my father and I have been interested listeners for a good many years.

—ALFRED D. SEARS

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Flight

TAKING off and landing described for the layman.

Request:—"I would very much like to know the general process of:

1. A take-off.
2. A barrel roll.
3. A good three point landing.
4. And why is an outside loop difficult?"

—LEONARD MAUTNER, Cedarhurst, Long Island

Reply, by Lieut. Jeffrey R. Starks:—1. In a take-off the pilot holds the rudder neutral, or operates it to correct for any tendency of the plane to swerve sideways; that is, to counteract tendency to ground loop. He pushes the stick forward to get the tail up and the plane running along on its landing gear wheels. He also keeps his stick along the centerline unless he operates it in a side motion to actuate the ailerons and so keep the plane from getting a wing down. The take-off, by the way, is into the wind, that is, facing the direction *from* which (not *to* which) the wind is blowing. When the plane has attained approximately flying speed the pilot pulls back slightly, or twitches back, on the stick, pulling the plane off the ground a bit and so suddenly reducing the wheel friction on the ground that the plane speeds up a bit and so gains considerably more than flying speed.

The pilot, as soon as the plane is off the ground, pushes the stick forward a bit until this extra speed is attained, thus giving him a bit of safety. Then he pulls the stick back and climbs as steeply as his plane will let him or as he desires.

2. There are two rolls, fast rolls and slow rolls. In the average plane the pilot, to make a fast barrel roll, opens the throttle and noses down a bit to pick up excess speed. When he has this he pulls back the stick sharply and kicks the rudder. The stick action causes the plane to want to loop, the rudder action gives the plane a tendency to turn or yaw. This combination makes the plane corkscrew, which is about what a roll is. When the plane is almost ready to come right-side-up, the pilot neutralizes the controls and also works against them a bit, causing the plane to right itself and resume its normal flight.

3. In a good three-point landing the pilot comes down with engine throttled and, as he nears the ground, pulls back on the stick, thus pulling the tail down so that from level flying position the plane assumes the nose-high position that it takes when resting on the ground. This should be attained just before the plane (by virtue of its nose being pulled up and losing flying speed thereby, due to its inability to climb without power and the resultant stalling acting as a drag through the air) reaches landing speed. The plane on reaching landing speed, comes down, or pancakes. It should not be more than two or three feet off the ground when it pancakes, otherwise it will either bounce or *really* pancake and crack up, if leveled off too high. The three points,

two wheels and one tailskid shoe, hit the ground at the same time and the friction causes the plane to stop after a short run.

4. An outside loop is difficult for two reasons, the strain on the pilot as he is thrown against the safety belt when the plane noses over, and the strain on the plane when forced through a maneuver which most planes are not designed or built to withstand. The pilot must gage his speed just right when he is on his back so that he can recover and pull over the hump to an upright position. An outside loop doesn't prove a thing.

Siam

UNVARNISHED facts about shellac.

Request:—"When I was in Bangkok I met two men who were exporting a substance which looked like dried resin. I understand that it was made by some microscopic insect which lived on a certain kind of tropical tree. The material was used, I believe, in varnish, but the bulk of it was used by the manufacturers of phonograph records. When the radio came in the bottom fell out of the market.

Could you give me the name of this material and tell me where I can get some information about it and its propagation or culture?

What was the F.O.B. price of it before the slump and what is the price of it now? If you can not give me this information, you might be able to tell me if there is now much demand for it.

If the product had not been gathered from a tree or rather a grove since 1925 would the resin be of poor quality, worthless, or more valuable? Would the grove be ruined by neglect and the increased number of insects, or would it have increased in value?"

—CLARK BROCKMAN, Columbia, South Carolina

Reply, by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—The stuff you speak of sounds like lac, used, as you say, for phonograph records and for high grade shellac and some varnishes.

The lac bug is *Coccus lacca*, or *Tachardia lacca*, a close cousin of the cochineal bug, *Coccus cacti*. Like its cousin, the lac bug in its natural state yields a red dye, formerly the lac dye of commerce which has now been put out of business by German chemicals—and that, I should say, would be the reason of the slump in your Bangkok friends' business, rather than phonograph records.

How can one describe lac bugs? Something like the little green rose aphids, only multiplied by several millions, and ruby red, of course. The bugs live on the sap of certain shrubs—mostly fig species. They hatch out eggs by the myriad and the young lacs stay right at home on the same twig and exude lac and hatch out more myriads. So that a twig may be encrusted half an inch thick with dried goo. This is the "stick lac" that you must have seen sold in the Bangkok market.

As to price. That's difficult to fix. Depending upon season and quantity available, Bangkok market prices might vary from three ticals per chang ($1.00 per 2½ lbs.) up to eight or ten ticals. Smart native buyers, on the other hand, might go to the jungle collectors up in Chieng Mai or Nong Kai and pay them as little as half a tical's worth of trade goods per chang.

A commercial grove is no more than a plantation of young saplings suitable for the nourishment of the lac bugs.

There is still plenty of demand for lac, since it is the indispensable element of shellac. For this purpose it is crushed, washed, melted with about 25% of orpiment (arsenic sulphide—so some folks won't drink it), bleached out with chlorine gas, mixed in cheaper grades, with a certain amount of rosin, and sold as "*pure* white shellac."

An abandoned grove would be all the better for a period of abandonment, thereby giving the bugs time to smear a few more layers of themselves on to the twigs.

The *Maine*

"BLOWN up by persons unknown . . ." So say the official records of the Navy.

Request:—"I have been studying about the Spanish-American War and have found that history books differ on the question of who blew up the *Maine*.

Some say that it was so ordered by the Spanish government. Others say it was done by Spanish officers. Others say it was done by the Cubans. And still others say it was done by the people on board. And another book says it is not known what caused the explosion.

Have you the correct answer?"

—WAYNE JOHNSON, Flint, Michigan

Reply, by Lieut. Harry E. Rieseberg:—After a thorough search I find the same snag that you are up against, namely that various histories cite different reasons for the United States battleship *Maine* being blown up on February 15, 1898, with a loss of 260 lives. However, the records of the Navy Department do not officially state that the Spanish government ordered this done, but give as the official record: "Blown up by persons unknown".

Histories seem to state what the writers of same thought, as their own personal views.

Shooting Gallery

AN EXPERIMENT with a piece of string.

Request:—"Would it be possible to break an ordinary piece of grocer's string about six feet long if you hit it with a .22 rifle about six inches from the loose end, the distance being about twenty feet. I was at a shooting gallery the other day and they offered a prize of $1.00 to anybody breaking the string. I hit the string, and made it jump about three times but I feel there is not sufficient resistance

to the bullet and as a result it can not be done. Perhaps if I hit the string near the ceiling, the weight of the balance of the string might furnish sufficient resistance to break it."—

—CARL B. EIMER, New York City

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I will report to you the results of the experiment I have just made.

I hung twine, taken from a grocery package, in my woodshed where the light would show it well, and from twenty feet opened on it with a Colt rifle and .22 shorts. I presume the .22 short was the cartridge you were using, as it's the standard load in every gallery I have ever seen thus far. I may add that I fired ten shots by artificial light, as my duties on a State job keep me busy all day.

The string enclosed tells the story; I made three fair hits of ten shots, and none cut the twine, although it jumped up and caught itself in tangles. I judge that with the low velocity of the .22 short, the gallery owner was perfectly safe in making his offer to you.

With a more powerful cartridge, say the .22 Hi-Speed, it might be a different story. But, as you observed, there is practically nothing to give resistance to the energy of the bullet at that distance from the end of the string.

Bird

ONE evening a large bird perched on the roof of a Minnesota barn, and, if it was a wild turkey, a new and interesting record for the late northern range of this fast receding species has been established.

Request:—"I am writing you of an experience that I had some twenty-five or thirty years ago here in southern Minnesota. One evening during the late summer or autumn months a turkey appeared in our yard and, upon the appearance of my father and myself, flew upon the top of the house up to the ridge boards which were, I judge, about thirty feet from the ground.

Then again becoming alarmed by something, it flew from the top of the house toward the sun, which was just setting. Looking against the sun it was hard to see the turkey very plainly, but when we last saw it it seemed to be about a block and a half (about 30 rods) away and still going. I told this to some friends the other day and they, although they did not say so, looked as though they thought it to be quite a yarn.

Even though this was a number of years ago and I was rather young I remember it distinctly. Now I want your opinion for my own satisfaction. I have never heard of a wild turkey around this section and even if these birds were around I don't know whether they fly or not. I feel sure the bird in question was a domestic turkey. I must believe my own eyesight as being all right.

Are domestic turkeys not capable of a sustained flight of twenty to forty rods?

If not what sort of bird could it have possibly been that we saw?

I will greatly appreciate your opinion as to whether I could not have been right. If it could not have been a turkey, what may I have seen?"

—JAMES H. PARKER, Kasson, Minnesota

Reply, by Mr. Davis Quinn:—What you saw might have been a turkey, but it hardly seems possible. There has been no record of this bird in Minnesota now for sixty years. Seventy years ago wild turkeys were not rare in northwestern Iowa and southwestern Minnesota, where they inhabited preferably the deep and heavily wooded valleys. One of the few authentic records for this region relates how, in 1863, a farmer killed four turkeys from a flock of thirty living in heavy timber in a bend of the Des Moines river just at the Iowa-Minnesota line. But that this bird was never common in your locality, even primevally, is reflected in the writings of early travelers in southern Minnesota; they are all silent on the turkey, a bird conspicuous enough, if at all numerous, to elicit the attentions of the least observant.

Writing forty years ago, P. L. Hatch, then State ornithologist of Minnesota, expressed the belief that this bird had totally disappeared. The chance of your having seen one, however, ten or fifteen years later is not altogether unlikely according to this naturalist, who says further, "Possibly a straggler may yet be recognized in the southwestern extreme of timberland in Minnesota."

The wild turkey is capable of a considerable sustained flight; I should say for twenty to forty rods anyhow. The domestic turkey is of the same species and should possess similar powers of flight.

I can not think of any other bird that you might have confused with the turkey. Its comparatively huge size, its dark color, and manner of flight, all combine easily and unmistakably to distinguish the bird. If you are positive it was a turkey, and you seem to have enjoyed a good enough look at it to justify your positiveness, then you may have established a new and interesting record for the late northern range of this fast receding species.

Amazons

HEAD-HUNTING South American Indians who wore their hair so long they were mistaken for fierce and war-like women. From them the great river got its name.

Request:—"I have heard that there are Indians in South America called head-hunters. Is this correct, and if so what tribe of Indians is this? Why do they hunt heads and what do they do with them? Are they cannibals? What part of thecountry do they occupy?"—BRUCE COLLINS, Brooklyn, New York

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—The Indians you ask about are the Jiveros, or Jivaros, pronounced Gee-vah-ro with the accent on the last syllable.

They are called head-hunters because of their habit of cutting off and shrinking the heads of their victims killed in battles or raids with or upon neighboring tribes. They occupy a country on the north bank of the main stream (Maranon) of the Amazon headwaters. They do not hunt their enemies for their heads *per se*, but the heads are taken as trophies just as certain of our own Indians scalped their victims.

After killing an enemy they cut off the head at the neck and then slit the back of the scalp a slight way and strip it off over the skull, bringing the face off with it but leaving the eyes in the skull. A several hours' process is required to dry the heads, or skins from heads as they are really, with hot sand and hot stones until they shrink to about the side of grapefruits or oranges.

The Jiveros are not cannibals as a customary thing, although they may now and then have practised it as many other races have done, including the white race.

The Jiveros use chonta spears, blowguns with poisoned darts, and wooden knives called *macanas* for cutlasses. The men wear their hair long and in centuries past this was the reason the river Amazon got its name—Amazons—fighting women. In South America the plural name is always used for the great river.

Aquaplane

THE surfboard, borrowed from the South Seas, was hitched on to a motorboat and a new sport—graceful and exciting as skiing—was invented.

Request:—"I seek an explanation of aquaplanes I have seen them in action in news reels many times' but one can not gather much from a picture. I would like to know the principles of operating one. When one climbs upon one is it at rest or is it in motion? Will it support one when at rest? About what is the minimum speed for one to be handled? Exactly how is it balanced? Do you bank on corners or just get swung around?"

—CHARLES MAGRUDER, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Raymond S. Spears:—Seems like more of the boys have thought up more puzzling questions lately than I've had in years.

Aquaplaning is a development of the surfboard of the various South Sea Islands. At first it was just a board which floated and on which one rode ashore in the big surf of the Pacific.

This, however, didn't prove exciting enough for some of the riders where the surf was a low ripple, as on the Pacific Coast and down Florida way. Some one experimented by hitching on to a motorboat and being scooted over calm waters of bays and bayous. It was just a tow from a motorboat, fastened to the head of the board.

Adventuring, however, the experimenters (probably through memory of being towed on skis in the snow in the Alps or Norway, by horses, with skis fast to the feet, holding on the tugs or reins with the hands), took hold of the rope, instead of having it fastened to the board. It was just a step to standing up and controlling the board with the feet—and that's the trick. The board must not be too slick for the feet to hold. It may be towed by a rope, the rider standing up, holding on to the "reins." Usually the board is towed and the rider stands on it and holds a pair of ropes, or reins. The board skips over the water, not through it like a boat—and there are various methods, ranging down to just a mile or two an hour up to fast and dangerous speeds. One learns slowly.

Bike

GETTING into the six-day races.

Request:—"How could I get into the six-day bicycle races on the Eastern tracks, and which make of bike would you recommend?"

—A. T. NICHOLLS, Pensacola, Florida

Reply, by Mr. Arthur J. Lea Mond:—The usual qualification for appearance in an American six-day bike race is past performances in the amateur and preferably the professional ranks. John M. Chapman, who controls the board track racing in this country, generally chooses his six-day participants from those who have raced during the summer season on American and foreign tracks.

If your ambitions are strong enough for you to insist on following the bike game, the proper move would be to come North and start racing at one of the Eastern tracks. They are now located at Coney Island, N. Y., and at Providence, R. I., with the possibility of racing also at Philadelphia. In past seasons Newark and New York were the centers of the track game, but a fire at the New York track and the completion of a lease at Newark bring about some uncertainty as to racing in those cities this year

As to the best type of a racing bike, there are several; the choice usually resting with an individual rider. A standard make, specified for road or track riding, is safe.

Ranch

THE COOK, his duties, hours and opportunities.

Request:—"My idea is to get a job cooking on a farm or ranch where my wife could go. We wouldn't care for hotel or restaurant jobs.

Now, here is where you come in. Can you tell me what localities would be most promising? Should I advertise in some paper out there, and if so, in what towns? What sort of meals do they usually have at the far out places? What time are they served? How many to cook for on an average? Am used to ordering supplies and cooking for a crew of thirty-five. Are cooking jobs plentiful there as a rule? And how do cooks rate? Socially, I mean?

Any advice or directions you may be able to give

me certainly will be appreciated, as I am very much in earnest about this migrating business and expect to make a premanent home somewhere out in the West." —CHAS. RIDER, Painesville, Ohio

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—Most of the larger ranches, where cooks (particularly men cooks) are employed are east of the mountains. That applies from Montana through Wyoming to Colorado. In Montana in the vicinity of Harlowton, on the Chicago and Milwaukee R.R. there are several such ranches. It could do no harm to advertise at any time. Try the Harlowton *Times*, Harlowton, Montana. Also Billings *Gazette*, Billings, Montana. You could write the postmaster at Sheridan, and Casper, Wyoming, enclosing a letter to the newspapers at those two points, asking him to deliver to the papers. I have forgotten the names of the local papers at Sheridan and Casper.

The meals served at most ranches that maintain a cookhouse where the employees eat, consist largely of meat and vegetables grown or produced on the ranch. Many ranches do their own butchering and smoke their own hogs, having their own bacon, hams and lard, of which there is none better. Of course the meal hours vary a little. Except that the noon meal is always at noon—straight up. The night meal is usually 6 P.M. in summer and breakfast is usually 6 to 6:30 A.M. This may vary a little.

A cook's standing in the community is much the same as that of other employees. In the West a man makes his own social standing regardless of his form of employment. I am speaking now of the country. That does not apply to the cities and larger towns where lines of social destinction are more or less present.

If you went out by auto, you would be able to cover a wide scope of country at a minimum of expense while hunting work. Roads are usually good to passable depending on weather.

The Mounted

MOTTO and badge of the R. C. M. P.

Request:—"Can you give me the official motto of the Royal Canadian Mounted and its meaning?"
—RALPH T. BROWNE, Schofield Barracks, I. H.

Reply, by Mr. Patrick Lee:—The official motto of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is "*Maintien le droit*"—which means "Uphold the right."

The French word "*droit*" also means "law," but in the Mounted Police motto it is taken in its broader sense.

The Mounted Police badge also bears the motto of King George V— "*Dieu et mon droit*," "God and my right"—which goes with the title of *Royal* Canadian Mounted Police.

The original name for the Force was, of course, the North-West Mounted Police, which became Royal North-West Mounted Police about 1904. The name was changed to Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1919.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**

2. **Where to Send—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.**

3. **Extent of Service—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**

4. **Be Definite—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD—THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE*, APRIL 15th

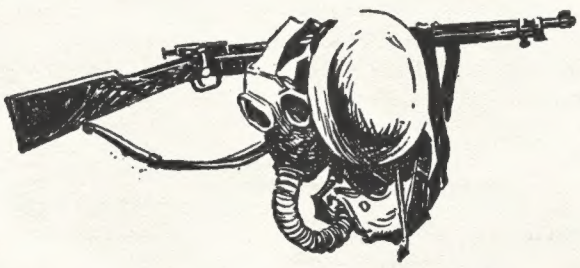
STUNT STUFF

A gripping novelette of Slim Evans of the Border Air Patrol

By THOMSON BURTIS

And These Fine Stories

Conclusion of THE SCAR OF FATE, the new Hashknife mystery serial, by W. C. TUTTLE; EVERY MAN UP, a story of the Canadian soldiers at the Front, by REDVERS; FLASHLIGHT, a story of a star newspaper photographer in India, by L. G. BLOCHMAN; AGAINST ALL TRADITION, a story of early America, by WILKESON O'CONNELL; FINNEGAN, a story of the seafarers, by R. V. GERY; HOME IS THE BOOMER, a story of mountain railroading, by E. S. DELLINGER; THE LAST TURK IN EGYPT, another exciting chapter in the life of the noted soldier of fortune, GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES; and Part I of DEATH IN TIGER VALLEY, a novel of the Siamese Teak Forests, by REGINALD CAMPBELL.



Still farther ahead

May 1st Issue

ARTHUR O. FRIEL'S greatest story since "The Bells of El Valle Perdido". All of you lovers of his South American jungle tales will know what this means—entertainment and excitement plus! "Bush Devils," a novelette complete in this issue, tells of two fearless white men in the mazes of the Venezuelan wild, long and aptly known as the Land of Many Deaths. Raw diamonds were the hope of their quest. But Fate willed that the reward of their courage should be greater than these . . . .

"Black Flag." Yes, a pirate yarn—a rollicking, devil-may-care tale of the men who sailed under the Jolly Roger. Different from any pirate tale you've ever read. As well it might be, for the author is TALBOT MUNDY, who gave us "The Soul of a Regiment."

Having himself been a member of His Majesty's South African Police, L. PATRICK GREENE knows more than a little about the caliber of the men who make up that splendid force. In "Jiggers," a complete novelette, he shows dramatically why they *have to* be good.

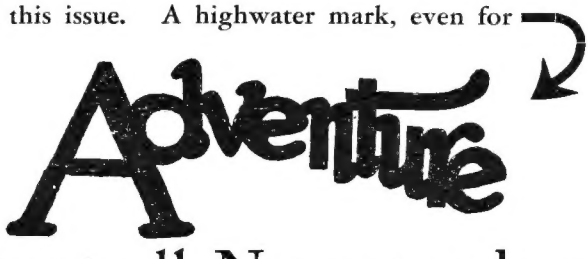
In war or peace, in the vernacular of the air, "An ace is an ace." And, as in a deck of cards, they are few and far between. "Hallmark of Castro," by ANDREW A. CAFFREY, describes the zooming career of a genius on wings.

"Come on, Zouaves!" That's the motto of the most glamorous of France's Colonial forces. GEORGES SURDEZ chooses it for the title of a thrilling story of the Zouaves and revolt in the desert.

Other fine stories in this issue, too. And, with the above, they pretty well cover the *world of adventure*, just as they're honor bound to give you a *world of pleasure:*

A story of the Far North sealing grounds, by A. DeHERRIES SMITH; a story of the Louisiana bayou country, by JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE; a story of India, by GANPAT; and Part II of Reginald Campbell's novel of the Siamese teak forests, "Death in Tiger Valley."

Watch for this issue. A highwater mark, even for



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